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OR, THE

HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS.

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History of *Deborah*, *Ruth*, and *Hannah*.

BEING A

COURSE OF LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE

SCOTS CHURCH, LONDON WALL.

BY HENRY HUNTER, D. D.

The First American Edition.

COMPLETE IN *SIX VOLUMES*.

VOL. II.

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.———JOHN viii. 58.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.———REVELATION i. 8.

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he had, that the Lord bleſſed the Egyptian's houſe for Joſeph's ſake: and the bleſſing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the houſe, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joſeph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, ſave the bread which he did eat: and Joſeph was a goodly perſon, and well favoured.

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Exod. ii. 1—10.—*And there went a man of the houſe of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a ſon; and when ſhe ſaw him that he was a goodly child, ſhe hid him three months. And when ſhe could no longer hide him, ſhe took for him an ark of bulruſhes, and daubed it with ſlime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and ſhe laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his ſiſter ſtood afar off to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to waſh herſelf at the river, and her maidens walked along by the river's ſide: and when ſhe ſaw the ark among the flags, ſhe ſent her maid to fetch it. And when ſhe had opened it, ſhe ſaw the child: and behold the babe wept. And ſhe had compaſſion on him, and ſaid, This is one of the Hebrew's children. Then ſaid his ſiſter to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go, and call to thee a nurſe of the Hebrew*

brew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Go. And the maid went, and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages: and the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son: and she called his name Moses; and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

SACRED BIOGRAPHY.

LECTURE I.

ZECHARIAH i. 5, 6.

Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my ſtatutes, which I commanded my ſervants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned and ſaid, Like as the Lord of hoſts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, ſo hath he dealt with us.

REFLECTIONS upon the ſhortneſs of human life, and the uncertainty of ſublunary enjoyments, naturally preſent themſelves, in the various changes which we daily obſerve, and daily feel. But alas, our reflections are too ſuperficial and tranſitory, to produce habitual ſuperiority to the world, uniform ſubmiſſion to the will of God, and efficacious impreſſions of eternity. Waſting and decaying every hour, we form and proſecute ſchemes for futurity, as if "our ſtrength were the ſtrength of ſtones, and our bones braſs." Reaſoning and reflecting as men, we live and

act

act as children; and purſue the bauble of the moment, as if it were "the pearl of great price." When the drama of human life is ended, and the curtain drops, lo, it has ſhrunk to a meaſure ſo ſmall, and contains events of ſo little importance, that it is difficult to render a reaſon why man ſhould have exiſted at all; and we are conſtrained to cry out with the pſalmiſt, "Verily, every man at his beſt ſtate is altogether vanity; ſurely every man walketh in a vain ſhew; ſurely they are diſquieted in vain."*

But my text greatly relieves this apparent inſignificancy of our fleeting exiſtence in this world, by conveying to us this important idea, that the Divine Providence is carrying on its great and wiſe deſigns, by feeble, ſhort-lived, and even worthleſs inſtruments. And the date of our latter end is wiſely and mercifully hid from our eyes; and every man is taught to conſider himſelf, his life, his actions, as of importance, that we may exert ourſelves to the laſt, and "do with our might whatſoever our hands findeth to do." Though our *fathers* are no more, and the *prophets* do not live *forever*, yet the *words* and *ſtatutes* which God commanded his ſervants the prophets, "took hold of our fathers, and they returned and ſaid, Like as the Lord of hoſts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, ſo hath he dealt with us." This leads us, in a direct road, to make a juſt eſtimate of the lives and actions of other men; and to conſider ſeriouſly how we ought to order our own converſation, how we ought to ſpend our own days and years.

In the preceding Courſe of theſe Lectures we endeavoured, beginning at Adam, and ending with Abraham, hiſtorically to delineate, and practically to improve, the lives of thoſe venerable men, by whom the world was firſt peopled, inſtructed and governed: and who, in their perſons, by their actions, or the events which befel them, ſucceſſively typified, or foretold

* Pſalm xxxix. 6, 7.

told to their contemporaries, the great Saviour and Deliverer of the human race, during a period of more than two thouſand years. By entering into the ſpirit of the prophet Zechariah, in the words now read, we ſhall be enabled to review that period with profit and delight. And this review ſhall ſerve to introduce the hiſtory of the other lives, which the ſacred volume, in ſucceſſion, preſents to our obſervation, and has ſketched for our information and improvement.

In Adam, we behold at once our natural firſt father, and our federal head: from whom, as men, our exiſtence is derived, and by whoſe conduct our character has been deeply affected, and our ſtate in ſome reſpects determined. "Our father *Adam*, where is he?" He fulfilled his day, he accompliſhed the purpoſes of the eternal mind, he then fell aſleep, and is now ſeen no more. But, however remote the date of his formation, and of his death; however diſtant from us the region in which he lived, however apparently unconnected with us in intereſt, in fame, or fortune, we are, we know, we feel ourſelves deeply involved in what he was, in what he did. In Adam, we all died; we all forfeited a natural, and loſt a ſpiritual and divine life: and, in Adam, we received the promiſes which have ſince been fulfilled, and to him firſt were opened proſpects, which the courſe of providence has realized, even the reſtoration of our fallen nature, by one "greater man," who has regained for us ſeats more bliſsful than thoſe from which by tranſgreſſion he fell; namely, the "ſeed of the woman, who has bruiſed the ſerpent's head." Our firſt father, where is he? Loſt indeed to us, but not to God. All traces of him, excepting thoſe only which perpetuate the memory of his guilt and its woeful conſequences, are effaced and forgotten; but his ſtation before God remains unchanged, his importance undiminiſhed. Dead to us, he lives to Him, with whom "a thouſand years are as one day, and one day as a thouſand years."

Can

Can we meditate upon the firſt man who *was created* upon the earth, without riſing in our thoughts to Him who *created* him out of the duſt of the ground, and "breathed into his noſtrils the breath of life? And who has of one blood formed all nations of men to inhabit upon the face of the whole earth." Can we think of our father after the fleſh; and not connect with him the idea of our Father who is in heaven? Is not the painful recollection of him in whom *all died*, happily relieved and done away by reflecting on the glorious ſecond Adam, in whom an elect world is *made alive?* And O, how is the loſs of an earthly paradiſe compenſated by the promiſe of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs;" that paradiſe of God, in the midſt of which grows the *tree of life*, always bloſſoming, always bearing fruit, and exempted from the dangerous neighbourhood of the *tree of knowledge* of good and evil.

Our *brother Abel*, where is he? Cut off in the bloom of life; fallen, fallen by the hand of a brother; but immortal by his faith and piety, qualities not liable to the ſtroke of death. "By faith he offered to God" an excellent and an acceptable ſacrifice. In preſenting the firſtlings of his flock, he had a reſpect to the great Lamb of atonement, and thereby, "being dead he yet ſpeaketh." Prematurely taken away, but not for a crime; a victim to malice and envy, he typified "Meſſiah, the Prince, cut off, but not for himſelf," crucified and ſlain in the prime of life, by the impious hands of his neareſt kindred. And, living under the influence of the ſame principle, we too ſhall become immortal, ſhall "endure as ſeeing Him who is inviſible, and preſent our bodies a living ſacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reaſonable ſervice."*

In the life and more particularly in the exit of the patriarch Enoch, life and immortality were more clearly

* Rom. xii. 1.

clearly brought to light. Hitherto, men had terminated their earthly courſe by deſcending into the grave and ſeeing corruption. But, when we come to inquire concerning Enoch, "where is he?" The ſcriptures reply, "By faith Enoch was tranſlated, that he ſhould not ſee death; and was not found, becauſe God had tranſlated him: for before his tranſlation he had this teſtimony, that he pleaſed God."* "He was not, for God took him." Our thoughts here ſettle, not on the gloomy manſions of the dead, "the houſe appointed for all living," but on the regions of eternal day, irradiated with the glory, and beatified with the preſence of God. We riſe in faith and hope to that bright world from which Chriſt deſcended, and to which, having finiſhed his work, and achieved his victory, he afterwards re-aſcended, leading captivity captive. And all who are partakers of the ſame precious faith contemplate with joy that ſame manſion of everlaſting reſt, "prepared for them from the foundation of the world," and "ready to be revealed in the laſt time," when the body ſhall be redeemed from the power of the grave, and the Saviour, lifted up on high, ſhall "draw all men unto him." In Enoch "walking with God," and paſſing immediately, ſoul and body, from earth to heaven, the world that then was, ſaw, in a figure, Him that was to come, whoſe meat and drink it was to do the will of his heavenly Father, and who has opened a paſſage, through the very gates of death, into the heavenly world, and that not for himſelf only, but for all who believe on his name, and who love his appearing. Enoch, our father, where is he? There, O my ſoul! there, O my chriſtian friend, where, through the grace that is in Chriſt Jeſus, we have everlaſting conſolation, in the good hope of arriving alſo. "O death, where is thy ſting! O grave,

* Heb. xi. 5.

where is thy victory! Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Advancing to the times of Noah, we behold the world first deluged with an overflowing flood of sin, and then with an inundation of waters. The measure of human iniquity full, and the vials of divine wrath filled, in order to punish it, up to the brim, and poured out upon an impious generation, to its utter extinction and ruin. Nevertheless, a remnant is saved, and mercy rejoices in the midst of judgment. Animated by the same principle which inspired his venerable ancestors, that principle which gave value to Abel's sacrifice, which strengthened Enoch to walk with God, and through which he was translated without tasting of death, Noah "prepared an ark for the saving of his house." The history, and method of redemption, by the Lord Jesus Christ, are so clearly prefigured in every part of this wonderful event, that he who runs may read them. Noah, "a just man, and perfect in his generations;" Noah, who "walked with God," and was "a preacher of righteousness;" Noah, who, "warned of God of things not seen as yet, and moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house," is evidently in all these characters and actions, a type of the *Holy* and *Just One*, whom the world despised and rejected; a type of "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, and hath declared him" unto men; a type of the great "teacher sent from God," to warn a guilty devoted race to flee from the wrath to come, and to conduct them to a place of safety; a type of him, who, chosen of God, and moved by pity and affection, prepared a present refuge, and an everlasting habitation, for perishing sinners. Of Noah, his pious prophetic father, when he imposed his name, exultingly exclaimed, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of

* 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

of the ground which the Lord hath curſed:"* and, in the bleſſed Redeemer of mankind, all his pious, believing children, enjoy the proſpect of a period, and a world, wherein "there ſhall be no more curſe;" and on whom the eternal Father, by the tongue of an angel, impoſed the name of *Jeſus*, becauſe he ſhould "ſave his people from their ſins." Noah, our father, where is he? where is the man who was Enoch's contemporary, who converſed with the ſages of the old world, who ſaw the globe one vaſt ocean, whom all the waters of a deluge could not drown, who received a grant of the whole renewed earth for an inheritance? All theſe ſucceſſive changes led but to the grave, and we ſee him no more. "All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died." Let the poſſeſſor of a continent think of this, and check his pride. Let florid, vigorous youth think of threeſcore years and ten. Let him, who is rearing a manſion of one thouſand feet by five hundred, meditate on one of ſix by two, and learn to die.

The ark which Noah prepared for the ſaving of his houſe, where is it? It fulfilled its deſtination, it eſcaped the wreck of worlds, it preſerved, and rendered up, its precious depoſit, then fell into decay. It exiſts but in deſcription, it has no form but what fancy has beſtowed upon it in a picture, or upon a coin. But its fame, its uſe, its end, its antitype are immortal. That magnificent veſſel, not the contrivance of man, but the appointment of God; conſtructed according to the pattern, formed and preſcribed by infinite wiſdom; preſerved, in the wild uproar of conflicting elements, by the almighty power of God;—reſting at length on ſolid ground, and unloading its precious treaſure, without the loſs of a ſingle life—are ſo many ſucceſſive, diſtinct, pleaſing, and inſtructive views of the plan formed, followed, and, in due time, perfected, of man's deliverance

* Gen. v. 29.

from sin, and death, and hell, by the Lord Jesus Christ; who thus speaks of his redeemed, and of himself, in his last solemn address to his Heavenly Father, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost;"* and in another place, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."†

The emblems of the raven, the dove, the rainbow, the altar, the sacrifice, and others which enter into the history of this patriarch, are beautiful and significant illustrations of the same interesting, all-important subject. And the whole taken together, satisfyingly demonstrate, that if "death reigned from Adam to Noah," and the "offence abounded," yet "grace did much more abound;" and that out of the ruins of human apostasy, guilt, and misery, the hand of Heaven was gradually rearing that glorious fabric of salvation, which, when completed, an enraptured universe shall contemplate with astonishment and delight. "This is the day which the Lord hath made: this is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." The sight of the world restored, renewed and blessed to Noah, the second father of the human race, leads us forward, borne on the wings of promise, to the still more magnificent prospect of the "restitution of all things;" to the day, when he who sitteth upon the throne shall say, "Behold, I make all things new;" when, according to his word, a new, more splendid, and more durable system of the universe shall arise, under the plastic, purifying hand of the great Author and Finisher of the christian faith, from the wreck of worlds consumed by fire; when Jesus shall bring all his ransomed ones to Zion, with "songs and everlasting

* John xvii. 12. † John x. 28, 29.

lasting joy upon their heads; when sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Sailing down the current of sacred history, the plains of Mesopotamia and Ur of the Chaldees appear in sight; and we behold an illustrious exile and his family on their way from their country, kindred, and father's house, like the first pair expelled from Eden,

> ——All the world before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.

We behold Abram, at God's command, going out, "not knowing whither he went;" Abram, the respected father of all them that believe, raised up of Providence, in the same important view, to carry on the same grand design. In the declarations which were made to him, we behold the plan of redemption assuming a clearer and more distinct form; unfolding its nature, and arranging its several parts. The glorious person who was promised to Adam, immediately upon the fall, under the more obscure description of the "seed of the woman," who should "bruise the head of the serpent," was now announced to the world, as "the seed of Abram," in whom "all the families of the earth should be blessed." And, henceforward, we have prediction upon prediction, ordinance upon ordinance, promise upon promise, event upon event, leading to, rising above, improving, enlarging upon one another, like the light of the ascending sun, gradually increasing from the early dawn to the perfect day. We observe types, shadows, ceremonies, sacrifices, disappearing by little and little; patriarchs, priests, prophets, lawgivers, and kings, retiring one after another, and giving place to "the Lord, our Judge, our Lawgiver, our King, to save us:" as the twinkling fires of the night hide their diminished heads, and the vapours disperse before the glorious orb of day.

But,

But, Abraham our father, whither is *he* alſo gone? Even the faith which ſurrendered an Iſaac at God's command, and which has forever preſerved his name from death, could not reſcue his body from the power of the grave. It ſleeps and is diſſolved in the cave which was purchaſed from Ephron the Hittite. He had not a principle of life in himſelf, nor the power of communicating it, to either his natural or ſpiritual poſterity. But "the words and the ſtatutes, which God commanded him and his other ſervants the prophets, took hold of them," and continue to lay hold of us. In the midſt of all this mortality and change, one thing is immutable and eternal, the word, the purpoſe, the decree of the Moſt High. "Heaven and earth may paſs away, but *it* ſhall not paſs away." Our father Abraham, where is he? Behold him in yonder world of bliſs, with "Lazarus in his boſom," reſting from all his own troubles; and cheriſhing the poor, the outcaſt, the afflicted, the tormented; enjoying "the end of his faith, the ſalvation of his ſoul," and waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of his body;" beholding him face to face, whom once he beheld afar off, and as in a glaſs darkly."

Who is this that breaks in upon us at once in meridian glory? What bright day dazzles the wondering eye, preceded by no dawn, ſucceeded by no evening? It is Melchizedec, that "king of righteouſneſs and peace," that "prieſt of the moſt high God," whoſe generation none can declare, whoſe nature and perſon none is able to deſcribe. Is he but as one of the prophets, or is he the Lord of the prophets himſelf, pronouncing the bleſſing which he alone can confer; celebrating in an early age, that euchariſt, which ſhould be the memorial of his office and glorious achievement, till time expire? In him, whatever he were, a type, or the Son of God revealed; a ſhadow, or the ſubſtance; in him we behold the great leading object of Providence diſcloſed to our view; that prieſthood

prieſthood which is unchangeable, that kingdom which ſhall never be deſtroyed, that Prince of peace, who has reconciled guilty men unto God, that righteouſneſs through which we have acceſs with humble confidence to the throne of grace. "Abraham rejoiced to ſee that day." It ſtrengthened him to wait patiently for the promiſed ſeed; it cheered his wanderings from place to place; it fortified his heart to the ſacrifice of his Iſaac; it laid his hoary head with hope in the duſt.

—Having from this eminence ſurveyed the ground through which we have travelled; a delightful landſcape, terminating in the diſtant hills of Eden, and watered by the fair river of PROMISE, meandering through its whole vaſt extent—we look forward, in hope and deſire, to the happy plains where Iſaac pitched his tent, and Jacob fed his flocks; to the nations, which Joſeph ſaved by his wiſdom, and ruled by his power. And, in our intended progreſs, eternal Spirit of wiſdom! vouchſafe thou to be our inſtructor and our guide: point out to us the objects which deſerve our notice: enlighten thou our eyes, guard our hearts, direct the paths of our feet. What we know not, that do thou teach us, what we do know, help us wiſely to improve. Following thee, "the crooked ſhall become ſtraight before us, and the rough places plain. The ſun ſhall not ſmite us by day, nor the moon by night. We ſhall go from ſtrength to ſtrength," after them who "inherit the promiſes, till every one of us alſo, in Zion, appeareth before God."

Have you ground of pride and joy, my friends, in the acknowledgment or recollection of your forefathers? Were they wiſe and good; bleſſed in themſelves, and a bleſſing to the world? Take care that ye degenerate not from their virtues, that ye diſhonour not their name, that ye ſwerve not from "the good old way" of piety, in which they trode. Is there in the line

line of your anceſtry, any circumſtance humiliating and painful? Efface it, annihilate it, ſink it, in a new exiſtence, derived from a celeſtial ſtock. Change the tainted, corrupted current of an earthly pedigree, for the adopted honours, the gratuitous inheritance, the ennobled ſpirit of your Heavenly Father's love. Strive to be the firſt of your race; and leave to your heirs a poſſeſſion infinitely better than the demeſnes of princes, even the favour of a good name, a pattern worthy of imitation, the remembrance of qualities which are not ſubject to the ſtroke of death.

You ſee, chriſtians, what is the leading, the commanding object, in the eye of eternal Providence. The ſalvation of a loſt world by Jeſus Chriſt. Adopt the ſame object, cleave unto it, keep it continually in view. All things elſe are vain and worthleſs; for they are paſſing quickly away. Our intereſt in, our hold of the world is diminiſhing every hour. Our conſequence, as candidates for immortal bliſs, as the heirs of glory, is riſing in proportion. When we ceaſe from importance, as the citizens of this world, our real importance begins to be felt and underſtood. I recommend not ſullen diſtance from your fellow creatures, nor peeviſh diſcontent. Live in the world, aſſociate with mankind, enjoy your portion which God allotteth you. But "uſe the world ſo as not to abuſe it;" and while you are cumbered about *many* things, never forget that *one* thing is needful; and make choice of that "good part which ſhall not be taken away from you."

While we ſpeak and hear, we change; and the hand of the executing angel haſtens to number us with the dead. We are going to join the venerable men whoſe memory we revere, whoſe faith we profeſs to follow, whoſe virtues we are bound to copy. Yet a little while, and time ſhall be no more; and we ſhall be contemporary with our fathers who have preceded, and with our children who are to follow us,

us, until the diſſolution of this ſyſtem. We look back to Adam, the father of us all, and we look forward to his youngeſt ſon. We look up, and "ſee heaven opened, and Jeſus ſtanding on the right hand of God." We look around, and behold "the nations of them that are ſaved" bending before the throne. We hear the Saviour's voice, "Here am I, and the children thou haſt given me." We hear the word of the ETERNAL FATHER proclaiming aloud; and the myriads of an aſſembled univerſe, angels and men, joyfully echo it back, "All is good, yea, very good." Amen. Hallelujah!

History of Isaac.

LECTURE II.

GENESIS XXV. 11.

And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac: And Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.

THOSE scenes in human life which make the greatest figure in history, are far from being the most beneficial to mankind; neither were the persons, whose names have been transmitted to us with the most renown, and whose actions have dazzled posterity with their lustre, either the happiest in themselves, or the greatest blessings to the age in which they lived. To make one man a hero, how many garments must have been died in blood? And what are the acclamations of a triumph, but the miserable echo of the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying?

We are this night to trace the history of a man of peace: the history of one, who was not indeed exempted from his share of the ills which flesh is heir to, but whose afflictions being private and domestic, were patiently borne by himself, and disturbed not the repose of others; the history of one, who, by the example of his piety and virtues, did more to instruct and to bless mankind, than all the conquerors which ever existed, from Nimrod of Assyria, down to Frederic of Prussia. The life of Isaac, for seventy-five years of it, is blended with that of his illustrious father. For though, upon the face of the narration, the birth of Esau and Jacob does not appear till considerably after

ter the death of Abraham, yet, by comparing dates, we find, that the lads must have been fifteen years old when their grandfather died. And we may justly consider it as no slight trial of the faith both of the father and son, that Isaac, the heir of the promise, should live twenty years childless, from his marriage with Rebekah. But their patience of hope, their importunity of prayer, and their confidence of faith, are at length rewarded by two sons at once.

I mean not to recapitulate the extraordinary circumstances of Isaac's conception and birth, as they have already been considered in the history of Abraham. We shall only take up those particulars of his story which are more personal and peculiar; in which, Isaac himself was either an agent or a sufferer. And, we find him at an early period indeed, feeling distress and suffering persecution. The day he was weaned, how was the festivity of that joyful occasion embittered to his childish, innocent heart, by the cruel taunts and mockings of his brother Ishmael! It is remarkable that almost all, at least the severest trials, which this patriarch endured, arose from his nearest and dearest relations. Hated and scorned from the womb, by his brother; devoted in sacrifice, of his father; called early to mourn the loss of his affectionate mother; afflicted for twenty years with the barrenness of his only and beloved wife; vexed, from their very conception, with the strife of his jealous sons, struggling for superiority; mortified and grieved to the heart, with the inconsiderate, unwise, idolatrous marriages of his favourite Esau; practised upon, and deceived in old age and blindness, by the address and cunning of his wife, and younger son; involved in quarrel upon quarrel, with his powerful neighbours, through the rashness and contentiousness of his servants: never faulty, yet throughout unfortunate. Indeed, a man's liableness to distress and disappointment is in exact proportion to the number and quality of the good things which he possesses.

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Do we enjoy peculiar delights? We are on the brink of danger.

At the partiality of Sarah to ſuch a ſon as Iſaac, we need not be at all ſurpriſed. It is pleaſant to obſerve, however, that this partiality neither corrupted his underſtanding nor his heart. Neither the indulgence which he met with, nor the proſpects to which he was born and brought up, ſeem to have rendered him, on any occaſion, inſolent or aſſuming. And maternal fondneſs met with its deareſt beſt reward, in filial duty and tenderneſs. Sarah lived reſpected, and died lamented, by her only and beloved ſon.

In reviewing the ſacrifice of Iſaac, that I may not encroach on your time, I ſhall only make this remark,—that this memorable tranſaction, was not leſs a proof of the faith of Iſaac, than of Abraham himſelf. As the obedience of the father was prompt and cheerful, ſo was that of the ſon. If the reſignation of Abraham merits praiſe, the ſubmiſſion of Iſaac claims no leſs; for his conſent muſt undoubtedly have been obtained. In both it was "a living ſacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, and a reaſonable ſervice;" and the bleſſing pronounced from heaven on that occaſion, applied to both, equally and in the ſame manner.

The next important event of Iſaac's life, upon the ſacred record, is his marriage. Swallowed up of ſorrow for the loſs of his mother, or abſorbed in devout meditation, he leaves all concern about his future fortunes, and eſtabliſhment in the world, to the care and wiſdom of his father. And he thereby reproves the forwardneſs and ſelf-ſufficiency of our young men, who preſume to think for themſelves in every thing before they have learned to think at all; who attempt the works of men with the knowledge and the ſtrength of children. In the various particulars of this tranſaction, we have a beautiful and intereſting picture of the ſimplicity of ancient manners and cuſtoms. Is it not a cuſtom rather ancient and obſolete,

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to see all parties piously acknowledging God, upon such an occasion as this? Is it not rather uncommon, to see a prudent father, anxious to match his only son with virtue and religion, not with rank and affluence, to the endangering of his moral and religious principles? With us, the most valuable accomplishments, whether bodily or mental, go for nothing, unless set off with gold; but Rebekah, without a dowry, was with jewels and gold courted to the arms of Isaac. Has the female heart alone in all ages been the same; perpetually accessible to the allurements of finery, presents, and praise? Where shall we now look for servants such as Abraham's, at once affectionate to his master, faithful to his trust, and filled with reverence to his God. This part of the history is an excellent commentary upon that injunction of the wise man, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."* Abraham's servant has hardly finished his address to Heaven, when lo, Providence, which works unseen, unknown, unobserved by us, has brought the subject of his prayer already to his eye.

And in what place, in what employment is the destined bride of Isaac found? Indolently reclined under a canopy of state, or issuing forth to breathe the evening air, accompanied by a numerous and splendid retinue of domestics? No, my fair hearers, look at Rebekah, beautiful, and young, and high born, bearing her pitcher on her shoulder to the well, to draw the evening's water for the family,—and learn, that the humble, yet useful employments of domestic life, are a virtuous woman's most honourable station; that whether in virginity, wedlock, or widowhood, God and nature have destined you to occupations, not perhaps highly honourable in the eyes of unfeeling wealth, or giddy dissipation, but highly consequential to the happiness of others, and therefore essential to your own. Look yet again to Rebekah, and learn affability,

* Prov. iii. 6.

affability, and kindness, and condescension—learn at once to perform your duty, and to promote your interest. It suits the early bloom of life, it suits your sex, it is congenial to your natural propensities, to be gentle, to be courteous; and, believe me, it is equally conducive to your honour and advantage. The obliging deportment of Rebekah to the servant, paved the way to her advancement to the rank of his mistress. And can you think the dignity of Isaac's future wife in the smallest degree impaired, by her civilities to his servants, or by her humanity to the poor dumb brutes which followed him? Believe me, an insolent, unfeeling, uncomplying young woman, is an odious, contemptible, unnatural,—a monstrous thing. Look at Rebekah yet once more, my beloved daughters, and learn openness, frankness, sincerity. Was she deficient in virgin modesty, that most attractive of all female graces, if, when asked, "wilt thou go with this man?" she ingenuously replied, "I will go." No; but the honest simplicity of nature was not then corrupted and disguised by modes of behaviour, the beggarly refinement of modern education. Then, what the heart and conscience dared to avow, the cheek blushed not at hearing, the tongue scrupled not to utter. I cannot yet cease to speak of that sweet, that amiable creature. Mark again, I beseech you, as she approaches her destined lord, how female delicacy, how maiden diffidence and reserve, resume their empire! "She alighted off the camel, she took a veil and covered herself."

And where, and how was Isaac found of his fair spouse? He had gone out "to meditate, or to pray in the field at the even-tide." This is the leading, prevailing lineament in the good man's character: a heart turned to devotion, an eye continually directed towards heaven. Meditation and prayer are the proper improvement of all mercies past, and the best preparative for mercies yet expected; a cordial balm for the woes which we already endure, and an infallible antidote

dote to the poison of those evils which we have yet to fear. What is not to be hoped for, from an union built on such a foundation? The fear and love of God on both sides; calmness, wisdom, fidelity and affluence on the part of the husband; humility, decency, meekness, frankness and discretion on the part of the wife; a mutual desire of pleasing, and of being pleased. "Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."* So wisely and so graciously hath God provided a suitable relief from every human calamity. And thus Providence prepares us, in one form of the school of relative duty, for a higher and a higher still, till we have filled every station with some degree of comfort and of credit. The transition from a dutiful and affectionate son, to a kind and indulgent husband, is natural and easy. And here, my young friends, you are furnished with a plain, but important rule, for forming the great choice of life. Is an undutiful child likely to make a good husband or wife? Have I reason to expect that one who has violated the first law of nature, of morality, of religion, will fall at once, and without preparation, into the more complicated and more difficult duties of the conjugal state?

But what lot of humanity is free from anxiety, free from disappointment, free from pain? The heir of Abraham's wealth; but what signifies Abraham's wealth? The heir of the promise goes childless. Who is so foolish as to look for perfect happiness in a world of vanity, in a valley of tears? Those, to whom the blessing of children is denied, are fretful and discontented; and those on whom it is bestowed, are in terror, anxiety and vexation every hour. Happily, I hear of Rebekah's suggesting no dangerous, no unwarrantable expedient as a remedy for this sore evil; and holy Isaac thinks of seeking relief

* Gen. xxiv. 67.

lief there only, where he was accustomed to seek, and to find the cure of all his ills. "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels: and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the other."* He asked a child, and his prayer is answered by the gift of two sons. And thus Providence, often slower than our wishes and desires, frequently compensates that delay by greatly outdoing our requests and expectations. But lo again, how care and sorrow arise out of our greatest comforts! The children are hardly conceived when their strife begins; and Isaac has as much reason to entreat the Lord, that his wife might be spared in the pangs of an unnatural labour, as he formerly had, that she might be delivered from the infelicity of barrenness. Indeed, "who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?" But this we know, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."†

The strife which thus began in the womb, becomes visible at the birth, and continues through life: nay, is transmitted to posterity. The remark of the fanciful and ingenious bishop Hall on the passage, is to this purpose. "Before Rebekah conceived she was at ease: so before spiritual regeneration, all is peace in the soul: but no sooner is the new man formed in us, but the flesh conflicts with the spirit. There is no grace where there is no unquietness. Esau alone would not have striven; for nature will ever agree with itself. Never any Rebekah conceived only an Esau,

* Gen. xxv. 21, 22, 23. † Rom. viii. 28.

Esau, or was so happy as to conceive none but a Jacob: she must be the mother of both, that she may have both joy and exercise. This strife began early: every true Israelite begins his war with his being. How many actions which we know not of, are not without presage and signification. In this contest, Esau got the right of nature, Jacob of grace: yet that there might be some pretence of equality, lest Esau should outrun his brother into the world, Jacob holds him fast by the heel, so his hand was born before the other's foot. But because Esau was some minutes the elder, that the younger might have better claim to that which God had promised, he buys that which he could not win. If either by strife, or purchase, or suit, we can attain spiritual blessings, we are happy. Had Jacob come out first, he had not known how much he was indebted to God for his advancement." Thus far the bishop. And thus, at the age of threescore years, and after twenty years from his marriage with Rebekah, Isaac became the happy father of two hopeful sons. And here, the expiration of your time obliges me to interrupt his story. But I must not conclude the Lecture till I have, in a very few short hints, endeavoured to shew you the analogy of Isaac the son of Abraham, and Jesus Christ the Son of God.

They were both raised up for one and the same purpose; even to manifest the mercy and love of God to fallen men; the one as the bright and morning-star to usher in the day, the other as the meridian sun, "travelling in the greatness of his strength." Isaac the natural root and progenitor of Christ: Christ the spiritual author, root and head of Isaac. Isaac was the son of much expectation, the subject of many prophecies. The set time of his birth was determined and foretold by almighty Power, by unerring Wisdom, long before it happened: thus the birth of Christ, the desire of all nations, was announced to

the world by a cloud of witnesses, not years, but ages, centuries, many centuries before the time. The time, the place, all the circumstances attending it, were written as with a sun-beam, so as to render mistake impossible. Both Isaac and Christ were conceived out of the usual course of nature, that the finger of God might be seen and acknowledged in both events; Isaac of a mother beyond the natural possibility of having children, Jesus of an immaculate virgin. Isaac was early hated and persecuted of his brother, the son of his own father; and the persecution of Jesus from the sinful world he came to save, began at his birth, continued through the whole of his life, and issued in a shameful, painful and accursed death. "He came to his own and his own received him not. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

But, what was seen in the mountain of the Lord forms the closest resemblance, and affords the sublimest instruction. In the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, we behold the father and son like-minded in presenting it cheerfully at the command of God. Abraham withheld not his son, his only son, and Isaac voluntarily surrendered himself as a lamb for a burnt offering. And on Mount Calvary what do we behold? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, and how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"† And Jesus gave himself for us "a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God." He "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood." Here also the Father and Son like-minded, and in the same view, and for the same end, the redemption of an elect world. "O the height and depth, the length and breadth of the love of God: it passeth knowledge!"

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* John iii. 16. † Rom. viii. 32.

The private personal character of Isaac, a man of calmness, contemplation and peace; the dutiful son of his affectionate mother; the respectful observer of his father's will, might, without doing violence to the subject, be brought into comparison with the pure and perfect character of his antitype, whose spirit nothing could discompose, whose nights were spent in prayer, and his days in doing good; whose "meat and drink it was to do the will of his Heavenly Father, and to finish his work," and whose dying breath uttered the accents of filial affection, and provided a son, a protector and a home, for his desolate afflicted mother. O the glorious excellency of that character, which exhibited the example of every personal, every relative virtue: which comprized the essence of all that is amiable in every other character, and left all created goodness at an infinite distance behind! Look to Isaac and be instructed. Look to Jesus and "grow in grace," and go on towards perfection, and "press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The next Lecture, with the divine permission, will contain the remaining part of the life of Isaac, from the death of his father to his own. May God communicate saving knowledge to us all, by every mean of instruction: and to his name be praise in Christ. Amen.

History of Isaac.

LECTURE III.

GENESIS XXVI. 23, 24, 25.

And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

IT is a pleasing and an instructive view of the Divine Providence, to consider one and the same great design as carried on to maturity, in periods and by persons the most remote from each other, without communication of intelligence, without concurrence or exertion among themselves; to behold the great God moulding, guiding, subduing the various passions, purposes, and private interests of men, to his own sovereign will; to behold the building of God rising in beauty, advancing towards perfection, by the hands of feeble workmen, who comprehend not the thousandth part of the plan which they assist in executing, and who, instead of co-operating, frequently seem to counteract one another. One digs his hour in the quarry; another lifts up his axe, and strikes a stroke or two in the forest; a third applies the square and the compass to the stone which his neighbour had polished. But their labours, their views, their abilities, however different, all promote the same end; and

and though they and their endeavours be frail and perishing, the work in which the Almighty employs them is progressive, is permanent, is immortal.—Here a shepherd, there a king; here a little child, there a sage; here a legislator, there a conqueror; here a deluge, there a conflagration, fulfils the design of high Heaven: and the glorious fabric of redemption rises and rises, though patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles sink, one after another, into the dust. Man often begins to build, but is unable to finish, because he had not counted the cost; but God "seeth the end from the beginning." He can never want an instrument who has heaven, earth and hell at his dispossal. "Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee," Satan is thy chained slave, and "ten thousand times ten thousand mighty angels minister unto thee." How then can thy aim be defeated? How can thy counsels fail?

The personal characters of the three leading patriarchs of the house of Israel, differ exceedingly in many respects, and their manner of life differs as much, while their ruling principle is the same. The faith of Abraham, ardent and intrepid, was ever ready to encounter the most threatening dangers, to undertake the most difficult employments, and to render the most painful and costly sacrifices at God's command. The faith of Isaac, placid and contemplative, sought the happiness of communion with God in calmness and solitude, and satisfied itself with the secret, untumultuous delight of beholding his family built up, and the promises of God advancing to their accomplishment. The faith of Jacob, active and persevering, wrought upon and excited by the peculiarities of his ever-varying condition, supported a life of much bustle and industry, and surmounted disappointments and afflictions the most mortifying and oppressive. For it is the office of this divine principle, not to alter, to suppress, or eradicate the natural tempers and dispositions of men, but to guide, impel,

or

or control them, in conformity to their proper destination.

Abraham, sensible of the ungovernable, encroaching spirit of Ishmael, of the numerous and pressing claims of his younger children, and of the gentle, yielding, unresisting nature of Isaac, had, with the prudent foresight of a good parent, made such a disposition of his temporal affairs in his life time, as was most likely to prevent contention and mischief after his death. Ishmael had been dismissed many years before, had already become the head of many numerous and powerful tribes, "twelve princes according to their nations,"* and from habit, inclination and necessity, had contracted a fondness for a roving, erratic course of life. He had been brought into a transient connexion with his brother Isaac, by an event which softens the most rugged and obdurate dispositions, the death of their common father; and their resentments, for a time at least, perhaps forever, are buried in the tomb of him to whom they owed their birth. But difference of interest, affection and pursuit, speedily separates them again. Ishmael betakes himself to his favourite occupations in the desert, and Isaac abides quietly in his tent, and tending his flocks, by the well Lahai-roi.

The sons of Abraham by Keturah had been more recently removed, with a suitable provision, into a distant part of the country.† So that upon his father's demise, Isaac found himself in the quiet possession of by far the greatest part of his immense wealth, but excluded from the society of those whom his own sweetness of temper and sense of duty, and the proximity of blood, would have led him to cultivate and cherish. And thus riches, the object of universal desire and pursuit, create more and greater wants than those which they are able to remove. By exciting envy, jealousy and suspicion, they separate those whom nature has joined; friendship is sacrificed to

* Gen. xxiv. 13—16. † Gen. xxv. 6.

to convenience; and, to enjoy in security what Providence has given him, the unhappy possessor is constrained to become an alien to his own brother. We cannot refrain from bestowing, in this place, a posthumous praise upon Abraham, who, uninfected by the tenacity of old age and selfishness, cheerfully surrendered, while he yet lived, a considerable part of his property, in order to insure the future peace of his family, and wisely left his principal heir a poorer man, that he might leave him happier and more secure. How unlike those sordid wretches, who will scatter nothing till death breaks into the hoard; and who care not what strife and wretchedness overtake those who come after them, in the very distribution of their property, provided they can keep it all to themselves, were it but for one day longer!

Isaac had hitherto trusted every thing to the wisdom and affection of his kind father, and to the care of an indulgent Providence, even so far as to the choice of his partner for life. But his father being now removed by death, and his own children growing up fast upon him, he is under the necessity of arising and exerting himself. For the blessing of Providence is to be asked, and expected, only when men are found in the way of their duty, and wisely employing lawful and appointed means of prospering. We accordingly find him, with the prudent sagacity of a good husband, father, and master, directing the removal of his family from place to place, as occasion frequently required; forming alliances with his powerful neighbours, for their mutual security; and presiding in the offices of religion, his favourite employment. And though Providence has deprived him of the counsel and protection of an earthly parent, he finds, in his happy experience, that the man whom God continues to protect and bless, has lost nothing. "Father and mother have forsaken him, but the Lord has graciously taken him up," "hedged him round on every side," and put the fear and dread of him

him into all the neighbouring nations, who, though they envied, durst not hurt him.

The distresses which embittered the remainder of Isaac's life, were chiefly internal and domestic; and, alas! had their source in his own infirmity, namely, a fond partiality in favour of his elder son; the mischief of which was increased, and kept alive, by a partiality, equally decided, which Rebekah had conceived in favour of Jacob. "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob."* Most of the evils of a man's lot may be easily traced up to some weakness in which he has indulged himself, some error into which he has fallen, some opportunity he has let slip, or some crime which he has committed. Of all the infirmities to which our nature is subject, none is more common, none is more unreasonable, unwise and unjust, none more easily guarded against, none more fatal in its consequences to ourselves and others, than that of making a difference between one child and another. It destroys the favourite, and discourages those who are postponed and slighted; it sows the seeds of jealousy and malice, which frequently produce strife, and end in violence and blood. It sets the father against the mother, and the mother against the father; the sister against the brother, and the brother against the sister. It disturbed the repose of Isaac's family, and had well nigh brought down Jacob's hoary head with sorrow to the grave. Parents ought to examine, and to watch over themselves carefully on this head. If they are unable to suppress the feeling, the expression of it, at least, is in their power; and policy, if not justice, demands of them an equitable distribution of their affection, their countenance, and their goods. For, if there be a folly which, more certainly than another, punishes itself, it is this ill-judged and wicked distinction between equals. One is ashamed to think of the reason which is assigned for Isaac's preference of

* Gen. xxv. 28.

of his elder to his younger son, "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison." The original language expresses it still more forcibly, "because his venison was in his mouth." By what grovelling and unworthy motives are wise and good men often actuated! And what a mortifying view of human nature is it, to see the laws of prudence, and justice, and piety, vilely controlled and counteracted by the lowest and grossest of our appetites! It was not long before the effect of parental partialities appeared. A competition for precedency, and the rights of primogeniture, engaged the attention of the two brothers, and whetted their spirits against each other, from their earliest years. The pretensions of each were supported respectively by the parents according to favour, to the disregard of every maxim of good sense, and of the destination and direction of the Divine Providence. Who it was that prevailed in this contention, and by what means, will be seen in the sequel.

While the family of the patriarch was thus torn with internal dissension, Providence was pleased to visit him with a grievous external calamity. "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham."* This, for a while, represses animosity. Distress, common to all, teaches them to love one another; and, instead of a struggle for precedency, the weightier concern, "Where shall we find bread?" now occupies their thoughts. This dispensation was probably intended as a reproof and correction to all parties. The parents were admonished of the folly of aiding and increasing the unavoidable ills of life, by wilfully sowing discord among brethren. Esau, ready again to perish with want, is stung with remorse to think, that in one hasty, impatient moment of hunger, he had sold, for the transient gratification of a low appetite, what no penitence could undo, no money re-purchase. And Jacob, feeling himself the cravings of hunger, was chastised for

* Gen. xxvi. 1.

for taking an unkind advantage of his brother's neceſſity; and, ready in his turn to periſh, might be conſtrained to adopt the words of ſtarving Eſau, "behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit ſhall this birth-right do to me."* For, although God ſerves himſelf of the weakneſſes and vices of men, he approves them not, nor will ſuffer them to paſs unpuniſhed.

Iſaac, warned of God, removes not into Egypt, the land which had afforded his father ſhelter and ſubſiſtence in a ſimilar ſtorm, and which has often proved an aſylum to the church; but retires to Gerar, one of the cities of Paleſtine, ſituated between Kadeſh and Shur.† Abimelech was the prince who at that time reigned over the Philiſtines. The ſame perſon, according to Joſephus, with whom Abraham had formed a connexion ſo friendly,‡ and with whom, for that reaſon, Heaven now directed Iſaac to ſojourn, till the famine ſhould be relieved. This conjecture of the Jewiſh hiſtorian, though not inſupportable, from a phyſical impediment ſeems highly improbable; if we conſider that ſeventy-five years have elapſed ſince Abraham reſided at Gerar: and hiſtory furniſhes few, if any examples, of reigns of ſo long continuance. It is more probable that Abimelech was then the general appellative name of the princes of that part of Paleſtine, as Pharaoh was that of the kings of Egypt. When we behold the patriarchs thus removing from place to place, a feeble, unwarlike, encumbered band, through nations fierce, envious, and violent, their ſafety is to be accounted for only from the reſtraining power of God over the hearts of men. The dreadful judgment of Sodom, where Lot dwelt; the blindneſs which puniſhed the attempt to violate his gueſts, and the more tremendous deſtruction which avenged juſt Heaven of their ungodly deeds, might operate powerfully, ſo far as theſe events were known, and their memory was preſerved, to overawe the neighbouring

* Gen. xxv. 32. † Gen. xx. 1. ‡ Gen. xx. 14, 15.

bouring nations, and to procure for Lot's family and kindred, the attention and respect which fear, if not love, inspires. And, as a proof of his supremacy, that God, "in whose hand the heart of the king is, and who can turn it which way soever he will," has frequently constrained the enemies of his church and people to be their friends and protectors.

This repeated visitation of Canaan by famine, was a repeated trial of the patriarch's faith. The promise of a land, so frequently unable to sustain its inhabitants, could have little value in the eye of a worldly mind. But faith in God discerns the principal worth and importance of temporal blessings, in their being connected with, and representing spiritual objects; and examines events, not by their agreement with preconceived opinions, and extravagant expectations, but by their moral effects and consequences. A region uniformly and unfailingly plenteous, might betray its possessor into the belief that its fertility flowed solely from natural causes, and God might be forgotten and neglected. A year of scarcity is calculated to teach man his dependence, and to force him to implore "the blessing which maketh rich, and causeth the earth to yield its increase."

While he sojourned among the Philistines, Isaac falls into the same infirmity which dishonoured his father in Egypt. Misled, by suspicion unworthy of an honest man, and fear unworthy of the friend of God, he violates sacred truth, and sins against his own conscience: for when interrogated concerning Rebekah, "he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife, lest, said he, the men of this place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon." * The criminality of this mistrust is greatly aggravated, by the clearness and fulness of the heavenly vision, whereby he had been admonished to bend his course to the court of Abimelech. "And the Lord appeared unto him and said, Go

* Gen. xxvi. 7.

Go not down into Egypt. Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee: for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."* Slight temptations frequently prevail, after trials more formidable have been successfully resisted and overcome. The wise, therefore, will reckon no danger small, no foe contemptible, no condition perfectly secure. The faithful will learn to speak truth, to do good, to trust in the Lord, and fear nothing.

Virtue is not hereditary in families, it descends but in rarer instances; whereas frailty, alas! descends from every father to every son. Virtue is the water in the particular pool; vice the torrent in the river, which sweeps every thing before it. The moderation, honour and good sense of Abimelech, are the severest imaginable reproof of the disingenuousness of the prophet,† and happily prevented the mischief, which Isaac, seeking by improper means to shun, had well nigh occasioned.

Under the protection and friendship of this prince, he has now obtained a settlement in the land; and by the blessing of Heaven upon his honest industry, he prospers and increases in the midst of difficulties. "Isaac sowed in the land, and received in the same year an hundred fold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew, until he became very great. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants."‡ But we are by no means to imagine, that

* Gen. xxvi. 2—5. † Gen. xxvi. 9, 10, 11.
‡ Gen. xxvi. 12, 13, 14.

that worldly success is ever proportioned to promising means and favourable opportunities. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Some men's sails seem to gather every breath of the wind: they get forward in spite of every obstacle. Others feel the tempest continually blowing in their faces. All things are against them, and though they set out with the fairest, most flattering prospects, unaccountably thwarted and disappointed, they "wax poor, and fall into decay." Let not prosperity, then, be deemed an infallible proof of wisdom or worth, or of divine favour. Neither let want of success be always derived from folly, or vice, or the curse of Heaven; for in this mixed, imperfect, probationary state, "time and chance happen to all men," neither can a man tell "what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow."

Every temporal advantage has a corresponding infelicity. Isaac grew rich and great, but "the Philistines envied him." And, "who can stand before envy?" That dark, malignant passion, prompted his surly, jealous foes to cut off one source of his wealth, "for all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth."* This was in effect to destroy the flocks and the herds. For without water, "the cattle upon a thousand hills" are a poor, perishing commodity. Envy considers that as gained to itself which is lost to another: and not only delights in destruction, from which it hopes to draw advantage, but enjoys the mischief which it works merely for mischief's sake. Envy will even submit to hurt itself a little, to have the malicious satisfaction of hurting another much. Abimelech himself, more liberal-minded than meaner men, grows at length weary of his guest, feels hurt at his growing prosperity, envies his greatness, and dismisses him with cold civility. "And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from

* Gen. xxvi. 15.

from us: for thou art much mightier than we."* Grandeur admits not of friendship; and friendship disdains to dwell with profligacy. Of all the men in a nation, the king is most certainly excluded from this blessing; and surely, his lot contains nothing to be once compared with it, or which can supply its want.

Isaac prudently gives way. He withdraws the hated object from before the eyes of envy, and, leaving the city, pitches his tent in the valley of Gerar. Apprehending he had a hereditary right to the wells of water which were his father's, and which the Philistines had maliciously obstructed, he digs again for them in the valley. And from respect to the memory of Abraham, as well as to keep alive the remembrance of the gracious interpositions of the Divine Providence in his behalf, he revives the ancient names by which the wells were distinguished. Particularly the name Beer-sheba, or, the well of the oath, is preserved, the memorial of the covenant ratified upwards of seventy years before, between the king of the Philistines and Abraham; and which was known by that name for many ages afterwards, as one of the extreme boundaries of the holy land. But the unrelenting jealousy of the Philistines pursues him from the city into the field. No sooner has he by industry procured for his family that important necessary of life, water, than the herdmen of Gerar endeavoured by violence to possess themselves of it. Isaac, fond of peace, chooses rather to recede from his just right, than to support it by force; and still retires, seeking relief in patience and industry. He finds himself still pursued by the pride and selfishness of his neighbours; but at length conquers by yielding. A victory the most certain, the most honourable, and the most satisfactory. And the tranquillity and ease of *Rehoboth*,† amply compensate the troubles and vexation of *Esek*‡ and *Sitnah*.§ Finally, to prevent as far as in him lay, every ground of quarrel, he fixes his residence at a still greater distance

* Gen. xxvi. 16. † Room. ‡ Contention. § Hatred.

tance from Abimelech. "He went up from thence to Beer-sheba;" where feeling himself at home, after so many removals, he at once pitches his tent for repose, and builds an altar for religion; and the hatred and violence of man is lost and forgotten in communion with God.

The expression, "he called upon the name of the Lord," seems to import, that when his altar was built, it was consecrated to the service of God, with certain extraordinary solemnities; such as sacrifice, and public thanksgiving, at which the whole family assisted, and in which the holy man himself, the priest as well as the prince of his family, joyfully presided. His piety was speedily acknowledged and crowned with the approbation and smiles of his Heavenly Father. For, "the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father, fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and will multiply thy seed, for my servant Abraham's sake."* His meek and placid deportment, together with his increasing power and wealth, and the favour of Heaven so unequivocally declared, have rendered the patriarch so dignified and respectable in the eyes of the world, that the prince, who from an unworthy motive had been induced to treat him with unkindness, and to dismiss him from his capital, now feels himself impelled to court his friendship, and to secure it by a solemn compact. Abimelech considers it as no diminution of his dignity, to leave home, attended with the most honourable of his council, and the supreme in command over his armies, in order to visit the shepherd in his tent. The expostulation† of Isaac is simple and natural, and his conduct‡ exhibits a mind free from gall, free from resentment. The reply of Abimelech discloses the true motive of this visit. And we are not surprised to find, that fear has at least as large a share in it as love.§ The worst of men find it

* Gen. xxvi. 24.
† Ver. 27.
‡ Ver. 30.
§ Ver. 28, 29.

it to be their interest to live on good terms with the wife and pious: and good men cleave to each other from affection.

The covenant being amicably renewed, and the oath of God interposed, and, "an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife," the king of Gerar and his retinue return in peace, and leave Isaac to the retirement which he loved, and to that intercourse with Heaven, which he prized infinitely above the friendship of earthly potentates. And now, a delightful calm of eighteen years ensued, of which no traces remain to inform or instruct men, but which, from the well known character of this patriarch, we may well suppose were spent in such a manner, as to be had in everlasting remembrance before God.

At this period, his domestic tranquillity was again cruelly disturbed, and, by his favourite son; who, in the fortieth year of his own life, that is, the hundredth of his father's, introduced two idolatrous wives at once, into the holy family. This was two great evils in one. It was being unequally yoked with infidelity; and carrying on a practice which has ever been and ever will be fatal to domestic peace. The daughter of an Hittite would naturally be disposed to interrupt the religious harmony which prevailed in Isaac's habitation, and two wives at once would, as certainly, be disposed to annoy each other, and to embroil the whole family in their quarrels. Isaac was well acquainted with the solicitude of his pious father on his own account, in the important article, marriage; and was conscious of a similar anxiety respecting the settlement of his sons. We may easily conceive, then, how he felt at this accumulated irregularity and imprudence of Esau. He was wounded there, where as a man, a father, and a servant of the true God, he was most vulnerable. To be neglected, unacknowledged in a matter of the highest moment to his comfort, by that son whom he had cherished

cherished with the fondest affection, and on whom he rested his fondest hopes; how mortifying to a father! But besides, the holy descent was in danger of being marred by an impure heathenish mixture; and the minds of his grand-children likely to be perverted from the knowledge and worship of the God of their fathers. Such is the ungracious return which parents often meet with, for all that profusion of tenderness and affection which they lavish upon their offspring; such their reward, for all their wearisome days, and sleepless nights. The ingrates dispose of their affections, their persons, their prospects, their all, in a hasty fit of passion: as if the father who brought them up with so much toil and trouble, as if the mother who bore them had no concern in the matter. The ungrateful disorderly conduct of their elder son, and no wonder, was "a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah."

Whether it was from the vexation occasioned by this event, from disease, from accident, or some natural weakness in the organs of sight, we are not informed, but we find Isaac, in the one hundred and thirty-fifth year of his life,—in a state of total blindness; and he was probably visited with the loss of that precious sense at a much earlier period. But forty-five years, at least, of his earthly pilgrimage were passed in this dark and comfortless state. All men wish to live to old age; but when they have attained their wish, they are apt to repine at the infirmities and the discomforts which are necessarily incident to it. They would be old; but they would not be blind, and palsied, and feeble. They would be old; but they would not be neglected, wearied of, and forsaken. They would be old; but they would not be practised upon and deceived. But, old age certainly brings on all these, and many more inconveniences; and vain it is to dream of the benefit, without the care. We read but of one, that is Moses himself,

whose "eye, at the age of one hundred and twenty, was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

This dark period of Isaac's life, containing many interesting and instructive particulars, will furnish matter for a separate discourse. In reviewing the past, we are under the necessity of again admonishing parents, on that momentous article,—Impartiality in the distribution of their attention, their tenderness, and their property, among their children. The trifling circumstances of name, of personal likeness, of beauty and deformity, and the like, over which parents had little power, and the children none at all; and which in themselves have neither merit nor demerit, and are the objects of neither just praise nor blame, have been known to establish distinctions in families, which destroyed their peace, and accelerated their ruin. Children unborn have often felt the dire effects of a silly nick-name, imposed on a progenitor whom they knew not, and whose relation to them was thereby rendered a curse. Men are often deemed unfortunate, both by themselves and others, where they deserve to be reckoned unwise. They themselves do the mischief, and then wonder how it came about. They spoil their children, and then complain that they are so perverse. I know how difficult it is to bring up youth; how difficult to bear an even hand between child and child, to counteract the bias of favour and affection, to conceal and disguise the strong emotions of the heart. But it is only the more necessary to be prudent, to be vigilant, "to walk circumspectly," and, to ask "wisdom of God."

History

Hiſtory of Iſaac.

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS xxvii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

And it came to paſs, that when Iſaac was old, and his eyes were dim, ſo that he could not ſee, he called Eſau his eldeſt ſon, and ſaid unto him, My ſon. And he ſaid unto him, Behold, here am I. And he ſaid, Behold, now I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now, therefore, take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me ſome veniſon; and make me ſavoury meat, ſuch as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my ſoul may bleſs thee before I die. And Rebekah heard when Iſaac ſpake to Eſau his ſon: and Eſau went to the field to hunt for veniſon, and to bring it.

THERE is a generous principle in human nature which commonly diſpoſes us to take part with the weakeſt. We feel an honeſt indignation at ſeeing weakneſs oppreſſed by might, honeſty over-reached by cunning, and unſuſpecting goodneſs played upon by ſelfiſhneſs and knavery. God himſelf feels the inſults offered to the deſtitute and the helpleſs; declares himſelf "the judge of the widow, the protector of the fatherleſs, the ſhield of the ſtranger." He aims his thunder at the head of him who putteth a "ſtumbling-block in the way of the blind, and planteth a ſnare for the innocent." And though, in the ſovereignty of his power, and the depths of his wiſdom, he is ſometimes pleaſed to employ the vices of men to execute his purpoſes of goodneſs and mercy, he

loves and approves only "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,"* and the persons who love and practise them.

It is not the least profitable part of the study of both providence and scripture, to trace the conduct of a righteous God in punishing the offender, though he has subdued the offence into a servant of his own will; chastening his children by a rod of their own preparing; tumbling the wicked into the pit which themselves have digged, and bringing backsliders again to himself, by making them to eat the bitter fruit of their own doings. Happy it is for the children of men, if their deviations from the path of rectitude meet their correction in a temporal punishment. But woe to that man, whom justice permits to thrive in his iniquity, and to grow hardened through impunity; whose retribution is deferred till repentance can produce no change. Chastise me, O Father, as severely as thou wilt. Let me not fall asleep under my transgression, and thy hot displeasure. Dispose as thou wilt of my body, my estate, my wordly comfort; but let my soul live before thee. Let me see my sin, and purge me thoroughly from it.

—We are now to attempt the illustration of these reflections, from history.

The life of Isaac may be divided into three periods. The first, containing seventy-five years, from his birth to the death of Abraham; during which, being under parental government, and of a meek, unaspiring disposition, his history is blended with, and included in that of his father. The second, commencing at his father's death, and ending in his one hundred and thirty-seventh year: when it pleased God to visit him with extreme weakness, or total loss of eye-sight. This contains the space of sixty-two years, which may be termed his active period. To it succeeds a heavy period

* Phil. iv. 8.

period of forty-three years, up to the day of his death. During which we see a poor dark old man, at the disposal of others, moving in a narrow sphere; "knowledge" and comfort "at one entrance, quite shut out." We behold a man, who, when "he was young, girded himself, and walked whither he would; but now become old, stretching forth his hands, and another girding him, and carrying him whither he would not." This portion of his history, accordingly, is blended with, and swallowed up in that of his two sons.

At the beginning of this period, we find Isaac sensible of his growing infirmities, feeling the approach of death, though ignorant of the day of it, and anxious to convey the double portion, the patriarchal benediction, and the covenant promise, according to the bent of his natural affection, to his elder and more beloved son. He calls him with accents of paternal tenderness, and proposes to him the mingled gratification of pursuing his own favourite amusement, of ministering to his fond father's pleasure, and of securing to himself the great object of his ambition and desire, the *blessing*, with all its valuable effects.

Behold of what importance it is, that our propensities be originally good, seeing indulgence and habit interweave them with our very constitution, till they become a second nature, and age confirms instead of eradicating them. We find the two great infirmities of Isaac's character predominant to the last, a disposition to gratify his palate with a particular kind of food, and partiality to his son Esau. Time has not yet blunted the edge of appetite; and the eye of the mind, dim as the bodily organ, overlooks the undutifulness which had pierced a father's heart, by unhallowed inauspicious marriages with the Hittite; and Isaac discerns in his darling, those qualities only, in which misguided affection had dressed him out. Thus, a strong and lively principle of grace may consist with much natural weakness.

Rebekah,

Rebekah, equally attentive to the interest of her younger son, happened to overhear the charge which Isaac gave to Esau, and immediately, with the quickness of a female, determined, at all hazards, to carry a favourite point, she builds upon it a project of obtaining, by management and address, what she despaired of bringing about by the direct road of entreaty or persuasion. Unhappy it is for that family, the heads of which entertain opposite views, and pursue separate interests. One tent could not long contain two rival brothers, whose animosity was kept alive and encouraged by those, whose wisdom and authority should have interposed to suppress it. It is affecting to think how little scrupulous even good people are, about the means of accomplishing what their hearts are set upon; how easily the understanding and the conscience become the dupe of the affections. The apologists of Rebekah charitably ascribe her conduct on this occasion to motives of religion. She is supposed to be actuated throughout by zeal for supporting the destination of Heaven, "The elder shall serve the younger;" a destination which she observed her husband was eager to subvert. I am not disposed to refuse her, to a certain degree, the credit of so worthy a principle; for the piety of her spirit, on other occasions, is unquestionable. But I see too much of the woman, of the mother, of the spirit of this world, in her behaviour, to believe that her motives were wholly pure and spiritual. Religion, true religion, never does evil that good may come.

Admitting that Isaac was to blame, for misunderstanding, forgetting or endeavouring to contradict the oracle which gave the preference to Jacob; surely, surely, it belonged to the wife of his youth to have employed other means to undeceive and admonish him. Was the deception which she practised upon his helplessness and infirmity, the proof she exhibited of the love, honour and obedience which she owed her lord? Was it consistent with genuine piety, to take the

the work of God out of his hands? As if the wisdom of Jehovah needed the aid of human craft and invention. And, could a mother, not only herself deviate into the crooked paths of dissimulation and falsehood, and become a pattern of deceit, but wickedly attempt to decoy, persuade, constrain her own son, to violate sacred truth? "It is not, and it cannot come to good."

Having planned her scheme, and over-persuaded Jacob to assist in the execution of it, Rebekah loses not a moment; and Isaac's favourite dish is ready to be served up, long before the uncertainty of hunting, and the dexterity of Esau could have procured it. Jacob, arrayed in goodly raiment of his elder brother, disguised to the sense of feeling, as much as art could disguise him, and furnished with the savoury meat which his father loved, advances with trembling, doubtful steps to his apartment. In the conversation that ensued, which is most to be wondered at—the honest unsuspecting simplicity of the father; or, the shameless, undaunted effrontery of the son? But, in thinking of the one, our wonder is mingled with respect and esteem; the other excites resentment and abhorrence. It shews the danger of getting into a wrong train. One fraud must be followed up with another; one injury must support and justify another; and simple falsehood, by an easy progress, rises up to perjury. Who is not shocked, to hear the son of Isaac interposing the great and dreadful name of the "LORD God of his father," not to confirm the truth, but to countenance and bear out a wilful and deliberate lie? What earthly good is worth purchasing at such a price? Surely his tongue faultered when it pronounced those solemn, those awful words.

The good old man's suspicions were evidently alarmed, either by the tone of Jacob's voice, or by the hesitating manner in which he spoke. And, apprehending he had an infallible method of detection, if a fallacy there were, he appeals from the testimony

mony of his ears, to his feeling. But behold, craft is too deep for honesty. Rebekah and her son have not contrived their plot so ill, as to fail at this stage of the business; and Isaac is too good himself to imagine that others could be so wicked. He suffers himself, therefore, to be at length persuaded; and, refreshed with meat and drink, pronounces the blessing which he had promised. Had he not been blinded, when he saw, with ill-judged favour to Esau, and seduced by the flavour of his venison, he had not been exposed to this imposition, in his helpless state. Could Jacob have trusted in God, and waited to be conducted of Providence, he had arrived at his end no less certainly, and with much less dishonour. But "God is true, though every man be found a liar."

It is worthy of observation, that though Isaac, by the spirit of prophecy which was in him, foresaw and foretold the future fortunes of his family; though he could clearly discern objects at the remotest distance, his natural discernment was so small, and even his prophetic knowledge so partial, that he could not distinguish the one branch of his family from the other; and, impelled by a will more powerful than his own, he involuntarily bestowed dominion and precedency where he least intended it. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the *will of man*: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* Thus, Balaam afterwards prophesied, not what he would, but as the Spirit of God constrained him; and thus, Caiaphas predicted the death of Christ for the sins of the people; but "this spake he, not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation."†

Thus was Isaac deceived, in having Jacob imposed upon him for Esau. Nor was Rebekah less disappointed. For the blessing which she had surreptitiously obtained for her favourite, instead of producing the immediate benefits expected from it, plunged him into

* 2 Peter i. 21. † John xi. 51.

to an ocean of distress, exiled him from his country and his father's house, exposed him, in his turn, to imposition and insult; and, but for the care of a superintending Providence, the success which he had earned by the sacrifice of a good conscience, must have defeated and destroyed itself. But "the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."* "His decree may no man reverse." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;" but the wisdom and righteousness of God, can easily bend the wrath of man to their purpose.

Jacob has hardly departed with his ill-gotten benediction, when Esau arrives in the triumph of success and hope; his heart overflowing with filial tenderness, and panting for the promised reward of his labours. The feelings of both the father and son, when the cheat was discovered, are more easily conceived than described: the shame of being over-reached, resentment against the impostor, the chagrin of disappointed hope, of disappointed ambition; bitter reflection on the folly and danger of resisting the high will of Heaven, and on the hard necessity of submitting to the irreversible decree. Nothing can exceed the tenderness of Esau's expostulation, when he found the blessing was irrecoverably gone from him. The name of his brother; the occasion of its being given him; his conduct since he grew up; the repeated advantage he had taken, of his necessity at one time, of his absence at another, all rush upon his mind at once, and excite a tempest of passion which he is unable to govern. "And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father; and Esau lift up his voice, and wept."† The ability and the good will of an earthly parent, have their limits. He has but one, or at most, a second blessing to bestow. What he gives to this child is so much taken away from that other. But the liberality,

* Psalm xxxiii. 11. † Gen. xxvii. 38.

erality, and the power of our heavenly Father, are unbounded. "In our Father's house there are many mansions." With him "there is bread enough and to spare." Isaac discovers, at length, that he has been fighting against God; and while he resents Jacob's subtilty, and the unkindness of Rebekah, he acknowledges, and submits, to the high will of Heaven. The blessing which he had pronounced unwittingly, and which he finds to be irrevocable, he now deliberately and cheerfully confirms.

And now, behold the little spark of discord between the brethren blown up into a flame, which threatens destruction to the whole family. And, dreadful to think, Esau looks forward, with desire, to the death of his old kind father, that he might prosecute revenge against his brother, unto blood. Hitherto we have seen in Esau an object of compassion; we now view him with detestation; and we find the righteous judgment of God prosecuting this murderous disposition in his posterity, to their utter ruin. "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever."* "As I live, saith the Lord God, I will prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee: sith thou hast not hated blood, even blood shall pursue thee. Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it him that passeth out, and him that returneth."† "Thus saith the Lord, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof: because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and kept his wrath forever. But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."‡ Rebekah too, now that "a sword pierces through her own soul," ready "to lose both her children in one day," too late discerns how imprudently she has acted, and is glad to purchase the safety of her favourite at the price of his

* Obad. verse 10. † Ezek. xxxv. 6, 7. ‡ Amos i. 11, 12.

his banishment. So uneasily do those possessions sit upon us which we have acquired by improper means.

The threatening words of his elder son, must have speedily reached the ears of the aged patriarch also. And he has the inexpressible mortification of learning that the ungrateful wretch whom he had cherished in his bosom, and to whom his fondness would have given every thing, was enjoying the prospect of his approaching death, because it would afford a safer opportunity of practising his meditated revenge. This indeed was the bitterness of death, to "feel how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." And, thus severely the unwise attachment of both the parents punished itself, by the effect which it produced.

To prevent the dreadful mischief which hung over his hoary head, all his prospects concerning Esau, being now blighted by the heathenish alliances which he had formed, by his diabolical character, and by the rejection of Heaven, he gladly consents to the dismission of Jacob: and all his hopes, at length, settle on him whom he loved less. But, to part with the heir of the promise, at the age of one hundred and forty years, to send him away into a far country,—was it not to part with him forever? The fervour of his farewel benediction, pathetically expresses his despair of meeting him again, "God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people: and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."* These are the last words, this the last action of Isaac's life, upon record. But his latter end was at a greater distance than he or than Esau apprehended. He survived this event forty years. He lived to lose in communion with God, the disorder and dispersion of his family. He lived to shelter and to bless by his prayers,

* Gen. xxviii. 3, 4.

prayers, him whom the paternal roof could shelter and protect no longer. He lived to be refreshed with the good tidings of the success of the blessing, and the happy increase of Jacob's family. He lived to "see him" again "in his touch," and to embrace his grandchildren. This period of his life is a mere blank to posterity. But if we are ever admitted to read in "the book of God's remembrance," O how will these forty years of silence and oblivion arise and shine!

At last, old and full of days, Isaac drops into the grave. "The days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years, and Isaac gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered unto his people."* "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Time, and a better spirit, and the death of a father, have happily extinguished resentment between the brothers. Esau thinks no more of slaying Jacob. They mingle tears, as did Isaac and Ishmael, over their parent's tomb, and their angry passions sleep in the dust with him.

Thus lived and died Isaac the son of Abraham, a man of contemplation, piety and peace. A man of few and slight infirmities; of many and eminent virtues. A man, whom Providence tried with multiplied and severe afflictions; and whom faith strengthened to bear them with patience and fortitude. His story comes home to the breast and bosom of every man. His excellencies are such as all may, by due cultivation, acquire; his virtue such as all may imitate. His faults are those, to which even good men are liable, and which they are the more concerned to avoid, or to amend.

To young men, we would hold him up as a pattern of filial tenderness and submission. Isaac possessed in an eminent degree, that most amiable quality of ingenuous youth, dutiful respect to the mother who bare him. He cherished her with pious attention while she lived, and sincerely lamented her in death; till

* Gen. xxxv. 28, 29.

till duty called him to drop the grateful and affectionate son, in the loving and faithful husband. So long as Abraham lived, Isaac had no will but the will of his father. The master of a family may learn of him domestic piety and devotion, conjugal fidelity, prudent foresight, persevering industry. The selfish and contentious are reproved, by the example of his moderation, by his patience under unkindness and injustice, by his meek surrender of an undoubted right, for the sake of peace. Let the aged consider him well, and imitate his sweetness of temper, his resignation under affliction, his gentle requital of deception and insult, his superiority to the world, his composure in the prospect of dissolution, and the faith which triumphed over death and the grave. Let the affluent and the prosperous learn of him, to adorn high rank and ample fortune, by humility and condescension; and the wretched, to endure distress with fortitude and resignation. Let his faults be forgotten, and his infirmities covered; or remembered only as a reproof and admonition to ourselves. And let us be followers together of him, and of all them who "through faith and patience inherit the promises."

History of Jacob.

LECTURE V.

GENESIS XXV. 27—34.

And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field: and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint: therefore his name was called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birth-right. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birth-right do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day: and he sware unto him: and he sold his birth-right unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles, and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birth-right.

THE importance of the personages, to whose acquaintance we are introduced in the sacred pages, is to be estimated, not by circumstances which catch and engage the superficial and the vain, and which constitute what is called greatness among men. No; "God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." When great men

are

are to be sought for, the mind that is governed by worldly ideas rushes straight to the palaces of kings, or enters into the cabinet where statesmen assemble, or attends the footsteps of the warrior over the ensanguined field. But reason and religion conduct us in far different paths, and present us with far different objects. They discover to us, many a time, true greatness under the obscure roof of a cottage, or the spreading branches of a great tree. They exhibit dignity and consequence, affixed, not to the royal sceptre, but to the shepherd's crook; and feelingly teach us, that what is highly prized among men is of little estimation in the sight of God.

The person on whose history we are now entering is the third in order and succession of the illustrious three, who are distinguished in scripture as the covenant friends of God, and the ensamples of all them who in after ages should believe. "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Thus it is spoken of the men, whom the King of kings delighteth to honour. And what is rank and title, among men, compared to this?

Jacob was, by the ordinance of Heaven, destined to pre-eminence and superiority before he was born. And he who could have raised him to the rights of primogeniture, in the ordinary course of nature, was pleased, such is divine sovereignty, to bestow this advantage upon him, by the concurrence of various providential events. That men may adore, and submit to the God "who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will."

The struggle between the twin brothers began early, and lasted long. With more than ordinary reasons for loving each other, the ill-judged partialities, of parental affection, and the lust of precedency and power, inflame them to uncommon rancour and animosity. The strife, which was at first accidental, or instinctive, becomes at length wilful and deliberate. And the name of Jacob, imposed in the beginning, from

from the slight incident of his laying hold, with his hand, of his brother's heel, comes in process of time to be a mark of his character, and a record of his conduct. Events unimportant, incidental, contingent, in the eyes of men, are often matters of deep design, of mighty and lasting consequence with God. The natural disposition of the two brothers early discovered itself. Esau betakes himself to the active and laborious sports of the field. Jacob, formed for social and domestic life, abides at home in the tents, attending to family affairs, cultivating filial affections, and living in the exercise of filial duties. The Chaldee Paraphrast gives a translation of the words of Moses, rendered in our version, "dwelling in tents," considerably different in sense, "He was a minister in the house of teaching," understanding by the word *tents* or *tabernacles*, the place appointed for divine worship.

The first action of Jacob's life, which we find recorded by the sacred historian, is by no means calculated to give us a favourable impression of his heart. The young men were now in their twenty-fifth year. The elder entirely devoted to his favourite pursuit: the younger, ever on the watch to obtain that by art or industry which nature had taken from him. It happened on a certain day, that Jacob had employed himself in preparing a plain dish of pottage of lentiles, for his own entertainment. And here, let not the fastidious critic, who measures every thing by modern manners and maxims, consider this as an employment beneath the dignity of Isaac's son. It is, in truth, one of a multitude of instances, of the beautiful simplicity of ancient customs. The greatest heroes, and proudest princes, whom Homer has exhibited, are frequently found engaged in similar occupations. Esau, returning from the field, and having been either unsuccessful in hunting, or being too impatient to delay the gratification of his appetite till his venison were prepared, entreats his brother to give him a share of the provision which he had made for himself. Jacob,

taking

taking advantage of his hunger and eagerneſs, propoſes, as an equivalent for his pottage, no leſs a price than the favourite object of all his ambition and deſire, the birth-right. Unconſcious or regardleſs of its value, and in a haſte to ſatisfy the craving of the moment, he inconſiderately parts with that which nature had given him in vain, and which a father's fondneſs ſtrove to ſecure for him; but which a conduct ſo "profane" and precipitate proved him altogether unworthy of poſſeſſing.

But, was the conduct of Jacob pure and praiſeworthy in this tranſaction? It cannot be affirmed. Providence had indeed ordained him to the bleſſing which he ſo ardently coveted; but Providence neither appoints nor approves of crooked and indirect paths to the ends which it has propoſed. Weak and erring men may perhaps not be diſpleaſed, to have part of their work taken off from their hands; but if we preſume to take the whole or any part of the work of God upon ourſelves, it is both with ſin and with danger. "His counſel indeed ſhall ſtand," but the offender ſhall pay the price of his raſhneſs. It is a dreadful thing to get into a courſe and habit of acting amiſs. When once we have got a favourite object in view, how every thing is made to bend to it! The birth-right, the birth-right was the darling object of Jacob's fondeſt wiſhes; and, as if the decree and the prediction of Heaven had not been ſecurity ſufficient for the attainment of it, he ſeeks to confirm it to himſelf by a deed of ſale with his brother, and the interpoſition of a ſolemn oath; and finally, is eager to have the bargain ratified by the ſolemn benediction of his father's prophetic lips. "He that believeth ſhall not make haſte." But, alas! I ſee in Jacob an earneſtneſs to obtain his end, that borders on diffidence and ſuſpicion; and indeed, whom or what can that man truſt, who has not confidence in his Maker? The vile ſcene of impoſition and fraud practiſed upon his blind and aged parent, as forming an eſſential arti-

cle of Jacob's history, rises again to view. I like his taking advantage of his father's blindness still less than his attempt to carry a favourite point by taking advantage of his brother's hunger and impetuosity. The latter was but the skill and address of an open adversary; the former was the cunning and deceit of a crafty and undutiful child. Observe how cautiously, and fearfully, and slow, the footsteps of the deceitful must proceed. The moment that the conscience swerves from truth and rectitude, the man becomes jealous, and anxious, and timid. But integrity advances with firmness and intrepidity. "And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing." *

But, what could make Rebekah and her favourite son so anxious to attain this superiority? What was there in the birth-right, to make it thus fondly coveted, and unremittingly pursued? The answer to these questions will at least plead some excuse for their zeal, if not wholly do away the guilt of their falsehood. First—The gift of prophecy was known to reside in the patriarch Isaac; and the parental benediction, in certain circumstances, was considered as having the force of a prediction. Secondly—Pre-eminency and power over the rest of the family in patriarchal times, were affixed to priority of birth; thus God speaks to Cain concerning Abel, "Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." Thirdly—A double portion of the paternal inheritance appertained to the first born. And this perhaps explains the meaning of Elisha's request at the rapture of Elijah, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me:" not as if he meant to ask, or expect, twice so much as Elijah had, but the share of an elder brother. Fourthly—The honour of priesthood resided then, and for many years

* Gen. xxvii. 11, 12.

years after, in the first born, and was justly considered as the first of privileges. Finally—The promise of the Messiah, "the first born among many brethren," was entailed upon the eldest son: and this was justly understood to confer a dignity and lustre infinitely superior to all temporal blessings. The guilt of Esau consisted in undervaluing and despising an advantage so distinguished. The offence of Jacob's fraud is greatly extenuated, if not wholly extinguished, in the nobility and worth of the prize for which he contended. Behold him then, retired from the presence of his deluded father, who had prescience sufficient to discern, at the distance of ages, the future fortunes of his family, without sagacity capable of discerning the imposture, which was, at that very instant, practising upon his credulity and want of sight. Behold Jacob retired, in possession indeed of the blessing, but haunted with the terrors which eternally pursue the man, who is conscious to himself, that he has acted wrong. He has gained the birth-right, but he has lost a brother. He has by subtilty stolen away the prohetic benediction, but he has raised up against himself an implacable foe. The possession of nothing yields that satisfaction which we promised ourselves in it beforehand; and conscience will not permit us to enjoy peaceably that which we have acquired unworthily. His father's blessing announced every kind and degree of prosperity, "the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, the servitude of nations and people, lordship over his brethren." But he is instantly constrained to become an exile and a wanderer from his father's house. And when he himself comes to make the estimate of his own life, in the close of it,—what is the amount? "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." His elder brother is declared his inferior, but he has by much the stronger arm of the two. And, while he is practising deceit upon his nearest relations in Canaan, Providence is silently preparing the means of requiting him in Padan-aram,

in the person of one already a near relation, and about to be much more closely allied to him, Laban the Syrian, a man much more cunning and selfish, and much less scrupulous than himself. As this is a character which the inspired painter has delineated with peculiar felicity and skill, it may now be necessary to look back for a few moments, and to observe the first opening of Laban's spirit and temper, as they appear on the face of the sacred drama.

Abraham's servant being arrived in Mesopotamia, in search of a wife for Isaac, his young master, providentially conducted, lights on Rebekah, the sister of this Laban, by the well of water. Having briefly unfolded his commission, and made her a present suitable to his master's rank and affluence, she runs home to acquaint her relations of the adventure. Laban, instantly attracted by the sight of the gold, and by the account he had heard, of the state in which Abraham's servant travelled, very prudently concludes, that such a connexion might be improved to very great advantage. Hence that profusion of civility and kindness to an entire stranger, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels."* Did we not afterward discover him to be grovelling, greedy and mercenary, this might have passed for the language of kindness and hospitality. But, when the whole is taken in connexion, we see a man from first to last invariably attached to his own interest, employing his very daughters as mere instruments of commerce, and prizing nothing, but in proportion as it ministered to his own advantage.

Of all the passions of our nature, there is none so steady, uniform and consistent as this is. Avarice never tires by exercise, never loses sight of its object; it gathers strength by gratification, grows vigorous by old age, and inflames the heart, when the vital fluid can hardly force a passage through it. What a feast for

* Gen. xxiv. 31.

for such a spirit, the concluding scene of the marriage treaty for Rebekah! "The servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things."* Such was the man, with whom Jacob was now destined to spend a very considerable part of his life; and whose treatment of him, in the eyes of the severest judge, may pass as sufficient punishment for the little fallacies which he had practised in his father's house.

Behold then, in the covenant head and representative of the holy family, "a Syrian ready to perish," leaving the paternal roof without an attendant, without a guide, without a companion; more forlorn than his grandfather Abraham himself. For the bitterness of *his* exile was alleviated by the company and conversation of his beloved Sarah; whereas, the affliction of Jacob's banishment was grievously increased, by the consciousness that he had brought it upon himself; and from the bitter necessity of enduring its wearisome days and nights, by himself alone. What could have supported a man in such circumstances? A man, who was attached to domestic life; a plain man, "abiding in tents;" a man who had fondly flattered himself with the hope of power and tranquillity; who had dreamed of superiority over his brother, but had not attained unto it? I can think of but one thing, that could have rendered his lot supportable, as it then stood. Jacob, after all, was a good man. His conduct was not indeed pure and perfect, but his heart was right with God. He had once and again been mistaken in the means which he had employed, but he had all along aimed at the noblest and most important end: and, from the chagrin and disappointment which ever attended the plans of his own devising, he had always a sure and a satisfying refuge, in the wisdom and mercy of God. In truth, he had not attained the knowledge of true, practical, vital

* Gen. xxiv. 53.

vital religion, in the house of even his father Isaac, in Lahai-roi: but he learns it in silence and in solitude, in the plains of Luz. It is a good thing for a young man to feel his own weight, "to bear the yoke in his youth." At ease, and in a multitude, we forget God—in retirement and danger, we learn and feel our dependence, and call to remembrance a long-forgotten God.

This is also a proper stage for resting on our way. We cannot lead our traveller from home, till we have found for him a place where to lodge. We cannot bear to see him from under the protection of the parental wing, till we are secure that he has got another protector and friend, that "friend who sticketh closer than a brother."

Conformity to the plan we have proposed, and regard to the analogy of scripture, would now lead us to exhibit the patriarch Jacob, as a type of the Messiah, to whom patriarchs and "prophets all give witness," and who was specially prefigured by the son of Isaac. But, his story is not yet sufficiently advanced, to afford a foundation broad and solid enough to support a comparison, such as a more extended view of the subject will furnish, and such as might more rationally conduce to the ends of edification. We deem it of more importance, at this period, to submit to your consideration a few general observations, respecting typical representation, and the proper use to be made of it.

First. In order to constitute a proper type, it is by no means necessary, that the person who answers this important purpose should possess perfect moral qualities. Were this requisite, who ever was worthy to represent the Son of God, the holy Jesus, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips?" But, as "the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity," though the law gives no countenance to error or infirmity; so Providence, "at sundry times

and

and in divers manners," raised up men to prefigure to their contemporaries an immaculate Saviour, who were themselves "compassed with infirmity, of like passions with others," and, whose faults are but the more conspicuous, from the honourable station and employment to which they were called. It will follow,

Secondly, That the comparison is not to be stated and pursued through every particular incident of the life, and every feature of the personal character of the person who is the type. Men of very different characters, and in very different situations, typified the Saviour of the world. To suppose every article of their history, condition and character to be typical and prophetic, would therefore, in many instances, involve absurdity and contradiction. Sampson, David, and many others who might be mentioned, were eminent types of Christ; but then, the resemblance holds only in certain great leading circumstances: the miraculous conception, for example, the Nazaritic sanctity, the invincible strength, the solitary, victorious achievements, the triumphant death of the former; the divine appointment and elevation, the royal dignity, the providential success of the latter, the subduing all the church's enemies; these, and the like, are the typical circumstances. But to pursue the resemblance throughout, to make every action of Sampson's or of David's life typical of something correspondent in the Messiah, would lead far beyond absurdity; it would issue in impiety and blasphemy.

Thirdly. Scripture, by direct application, or by fair, unstrained analogy, ought therefore to lead, to regulate and to correct all our inquiries of this sort. We shall else be in danger of rearing a baseless flimsy structure in the clouds, which can afford neither shelter nor rest. When pleasant amusement alone is the object, invention and fancy may be allowed their full exertion.

exertion. But when we aim at religious instruction, we must be contented to take the Spirit of God for our guide. And here too, men ought to be jealous and watchful over their own spirits; lest, in endeavouring to establish a favourite system, and to justify or support pre-conceived opinions, they give to their own wild imaginations the solidity and weight of divine truth, and, departing from the simplicity of the gospel, presume to stamp the poor trash of their own brain with the sacred impress of God. It has often, and with too much justice, been lamented, that many apply to the bible for a justification of the opinions which they have already formed, and which they are determined, at all risks, to maintain; and not to receive the information which they need, and to rectify the prejudices under which they labour.

Finally. To determine the nature and propriety of typical representation, it is of importance to inquire, Whether or not the resemblance, which we mean to pursue, has a tendency to promote some moral, practical, pious purpose? Does it inspire reverence, wonder, gratitude, love to God; dependence upon, and trust in him? Does it engage us to study, to search, to love the scriptures? Does it impress on the heart a sense of our own weakness, ignorance and guilt; and, of the deference, respect and good will which we owe to others? Or, is it made a ministering servant to vanity and self-conceit? Leads it our attention from practice to speculation, to theory from real life? Does it place the essentials of religion in modes of opinion and forms of worship; and, neglecting the heart, content itself with playing about and tickling the imagination? The answer to these questions will decide the point. By its fruit, the tree is known.

Should all or any of these remarks seem to bear hard on any of the comparisons which we have endeavoured to establish, we are disposed cheerfully to relinquish the most favourite analogy, rather than seem,

ſeem, in the ſlighteſt degree, to miſrepreſent, diſguiſe or pervert the truth. We mean not to wreſt ſcripture to our purpoſe: but would make our purpoſe with reverence bend to that ſacred authority. We would not with ſacrilegious hands force out of the bible, by violence and art, a ſcanty and unnatural crop; but by diligent cultivation and aſſiduous care, draw from it a plenteous harveſt of what the ſoil naturally produces. And, we now return from this digreſſion, to purſue the hiſtory of Jacob.

Hiſtory of Jacob.

LECTURE VI.

GENESIS XXVIII. 5, 10.

And Iſaac ſent away Jacob, and he went to Padan-aram, unto Laban, ſon of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Eſau's mother. And Jacob went out from Beer-ſheba, and went towards Haran.

AT what ſtage, or in what condition of human life, can a man ſay, Now my heart is at reſt, now my wiſhes are accompliſhed, now my happineſs is complete? By what unaccountably untoward circumſtances is the comfort of the worthieſt, beſt ordered, moſt proſperous families, oft times marred and deſtroyed! Not through vice only do we ſuffer, but up to ſome piece of imprudence, or inadvertency; up to ſome trifling infirmity in our nature, or ſome petty fault in our conduct, our greateſt calamities may eaſily be traced. One man has made his fortune, as it is called, but he has impaired his health in the acquiſition of it, or made ſhipwreck of a good conſcience. Another inherits a fine eſtate; but goes childleſs. There, we behold a numerous and promiſing family of children; but the wretched parents have hardly bread to give them: and here, both progeny and plenty; but hatred, and jealouſy and ſtrife, baniſh tranquillity and eaſe. The heart of this child is corrupted through indulgence; the ſpirit of that one is broken by ſeverity.

Iſaac

Isaac is wealthy, but his eyes are dim that he cannot see. God has given him two sons at once, but they are the torment of his life. He is fondly partial to Esau; and Esau does every thing in his power to mortify and disoblige his kind and indulgent father. He is unwittingly drawn in to bless Jacob; and, the very next breath, feels himself constrained to pronounce sentence of dismission and banishment upon him. "The whole ordering of the lot is of the Lord," but "men themselves cast it into the lap." Providence only brings that out, which, with our own hands, we first put in.

Jacob has by skill and address pushed himself into the birth-right, and by subtilty insinuated himself into the blessing. And how do they sit upon him? Very uneasily indeed. His father's house is no longer a home for him. Grasping at more than his right, he loses what he already had. Eagerly hastening to preferment, without waiting for Providence, he puts himself just so much farther back. And, seeking rule and pre-eminence in his father's family, he finds servitude and severity in the house of a stranger. If men will carve for themselves, they must not charge the consequences of their rashness and presumption upon God.

Behold the pilgrim then, on his way, pensive and solitary; without so much as a favourite, faithful dog, to accompany and to cheer his wanderings. His whole inheritance, the staff in his hand. Now, for the first time, he knows the heart of a stranger. Now he feels the bitter change from affluence to want, from society to solitude, from security and protection to anxiety and danger. More forlorn than Adam when expelled from paradise, than Abraham when exiled from his father's house, he has no gentle mate to participate and to soothe his anxieties and cares.

The scripture assigns no reason, why Isaac's heir, and Rebekah's favourite son, the hope of a powerful and wealthy family, was dismissed with such slender provision, wholly unattended, and unprotected too, upon

upon a journey, according to the beſt calculations, of about one hundred and fifty leagues, or four hundred and fifty miles, through a country in many places deſert and ſavage, and in others no leſs dangerous, from the hoſtile tribes which inhabited and ranged through it. But the reaſon, though not directly aſſigned, is plainly hinted at in the ſixth verſe of this chapter, which informs us, that Eſau knew of this journey, as well as of the cauſe and intention of it. Jacob therefore may be ſuppoſed to have ſtolen away ſecretly, and without any retinue, and to have ſhunned the beaten and frequented path to Padan-aram, in order to elude the vigilance and reſentment of his brother, who, he had reaſon to apprehend, would purſue him to take away his life. And beſides this, we may juſtly conſider both the errand on which he was ſent, to take a wife from an allied and pious family, to propagate a holy and choſen ſeed; and the homely, ſolitary ſtyle of his travelling, as a very illuſtrious inſtance of faith in God, and obedience to his will, and that not in Jacob himſelf only, but in his parents alſo, who could thus truſt the ſole prop of their family hopes, and of the promiſe, to dangers ſo great, and diſtreſſes ſo certain, with no ſecurity but what aroſe from the truth, mercy and faithfulneſs of God.

The uneaſy reflections ariſing from ſolitude, and inſpired by a gradual removal from the ſcenes of his youthful and happy days, muſt have been greatly embittered to Jacob, by the conſciouſneſs of his having brought all this upon himſelf; by the keenneſs of diſappointment, in the very moment when the ſpirits were wound up to their higheſt tone through ſucceſs; and by total darkneſs and uncertainty with reſpect to his future fortunes. However, the cheerfulneſs of light, the pleaſing change and variety of natural objects as he journeyed on, the ardour and confidence of youthful blood and ſpirits, carry him with confidence and joy through the day. But ah! what is to become of him now that the ſun declines, and the ſhadows

ſhadows of the evening begin to lengthen? Overtaken at once by hunger and fatigue, and darkneſs and apprehenſion, where ſhall he ſeek ſhelter, how find repoſe? Happily, calamity ſtrengthens that ſoul which it is unable to ſubdue. The mind, forced back upon itſelf, finds in itſelf reſources which it knew not of before, and the man who has learned to ſeek relief in religion, knows where to fly in every time of need. The ſtrong hand of neceſſity is upon our patriarch; ſubmit he muſt, and therefore he ſubmits with alacrity.

And now behold the heir of Abraham and of Iſaac, without a place where to lay his head; that head which maternal tenderneſs had taken pleaſure to pillow ſo ſoftly, and to watch ſo affectionately. "He lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, becauſe the ſun was ſet: and he took of the ſtones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to ſleep."*

——— "Sweet are the uſes of adverſity;
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."

Jacob, removed from his earthly parents, is but the nearer to his heavenly Father; a ſtranger in the waſte howling wilderneſs, he is at home with God. Cares perplex his waking thoughts, but angels in bands lull his perturbed breaſt to reſt; they guard, and inſtruct, and bleſs his ſlumbering moments. Who does not pity Jacob, as the evening ſhades gather and cloſe around his head? Who does not envy his felicity when the morning light appears, and with it, the recollection of a night paſſed in communion with God? Jacob ſleeps, but his heart wakes. What had been moſt upon his mind through the day, continues to occupy and to impreſs his thoughts after his eyes are cloſed. Wonderful, awful, pleaſing power of God! which in the city and in the field, at home and abroad, awake and aſleep, moves, directs, governs our bodies and our ſpirits as it will. What lofty

* Gen. xxviii. 11.

lofty heights is the mind of man capable of attaining! What wonders of nature and of grace is the great God capable of unfolding to it, when delivered from the groſſineſs of this clay tabernacle, or when joined to a ſpiritual body; when we conſider the aſtoniſhing flights it is even now capable of taking, when the duller ſenſes are laid to reſt, and their influence ſuſpended!

Dreams are generally frivolous, meaningleſs, or abſurd. But here is a dream worth repeating, worth recording; whether we attend to what was ſeen or what was ſaid. What was *ſeen?* "Behold a ladder ſet upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God aſcending and deſcending on it."* The circumſtances of the dreamer, partly interpret the viſion. Jacob's holy deſires, his faith and his prayers, had aſcended, as on angels wings, up to the throne of God. Protection, and favour, and comfort, deſcend from the eternal throne, as through the miniſtration of angels, on Jacob's head. The top of the ladder reacheth unto heaven, but the Lord on high is *above* it. It ſtandeth upon the earth, but the eye of Jehovah is at its foundation, and his almighty arm giveth it ſtability. The cherubim and the ſeraphim are not above his control and authority; a poor benighted pilgrim is not beneath his notice.

Thus, the great plan of the Divine Providence, upholding all things, obſerving all things, ſubduing all things to his will, was feelingly conveyed to Jacob's mind, in this viſion of the night. And in it, the world is inſtructed, that however great the diſtance between heaven and earth, however inacceſſible that bright abode may be to fleſh and blood, to celeſtial ſpirits it is but a few ſteps of a ladder; before an omnipreſent God intervening ſpace is ſwallowed up and loſt; and, condeſcending mercy, ſovereign grace keep that communication ever open, which the malice of

* Gen. xxviii. 12.

of hell and the apoſtacy of man, had well nigh interrupted forever.

But I ſhould have given you a very imperfect interpretation of this myſterious dream, did I ſtop ſhort in it, as merely a ſymbolical repreſentation of the plan of Providence. For, in looking into another part of the ſacred record, I find the ſame expreſſions and ideas, applied to a ſubject of peculiar concernment to the chriſtian world. Chriſt, when entering on the diſcharge of his public miniſtry, having giving Nathaniel a perſonal and convincing proof of his divine knowledge, adds, "Thou ſhalt ſee greater things than theſe. Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, hereafter ye ſhall ſee heaven open, and the angels of God aſcending and deſcending upon the Son of Man."* Here then, is the true myſtery of the ladder which unites heaven and earth. The Son of Man firſt deſcending to aſſume our nature, to achieve in it the work of man's redemption; and then, having finiſhed the work given him to do, aſcending triumphantly, in glorified humanity, up to heaven again. And, behold here too, "the Lord ſtanding above." The plan of ſalvation, as of Providence, is the deſign of him "who worketh all things after the counſel of his will." "Who in Chriſt Jeſus hath abounded towards us in all wiſdom and prudence," and who "in bringing many ſons unto glory, hath made the Captain of their ſalvation perfect through ſufferings."†

And who are they that aſcend and deſcend along this myſterious ſcale? "He maketh his angels ſpirits, and his miniſters a flame of fire."‡ "Are they not all miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them, who ſhall be heirs of ſalvation?"§

If what by Jacob was *ſeen* in viſion at Bethel be worthy our attention, no leſs memorable and important are the things which he *heard*. It was much to hear a repetition of the covenant of God with Abraham and Iſaac, his fathers, ratified and confirmed to

* John i. 51. † Heb. ii. 10. ‡ Heb. i. 7. § Ver. 14.

to himself. It was much to hear the blessing lately pronounced over him by the prophetic lips of his earthly parent, conveyed to his ear by a voice infinitely more sacred. It was much to hear that the land which he then occupied with his weary limbs, as a wayfaring man who continueth but for a night, should afterwards be given to him and to his seed for a possession. It was much to hear, from the mouth of God himself, the blessed assurance of protection through his journey, of success in his undertaking, and of a safe return to his native home. It was much to hear of a posterity, innumerable as the sand upon the sea shore, and spreading to the four winds of heaven. But the essence of all these promises, the joy of all this joy, was to hear the renewed, the reiterated promise of a seed descending from him, in whom "all the families of the earth should be blessed." What could Jacob ask? What had God to bestow, more than this?

Here then the vision ends, and Jacob awakes. After the obvious, natural, and, we trust, scriptural view, which we have attempted to give you of the subject, I shall not use your patience so ungratefully as to trespass upon it by going into a detail of the wild, waking dreams of paraphrasts, and Rabbins, and pretended interpreters, on this passage of the sacred history. It is of more importance to attend to our patriarch, restored, with the morning light, to the perfect use of his rational faculties, and making use of the admonitions and consolations of the night season, as a help to piety, and a spur to duty through the day. There was something so singular, both in the subject and external circumstances of his dream, that he immediately concluded, and justly, that it was from heaven. And is it not strange, that he who felt no horror at the thought of laying himself down to sleep in a desert place, under the cloud of night, and alone, is filled with a holy dread when morning arose, at the thought of being surrounded with God.

"And

"And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God: and this is the gate of heaven."* And, if the visits of the Almighty, as a father and a friend, be thus awful even to good men, what must be the visitations of his wrath to the ungodly and the sinner?

Jacob arises immediately, and erects a monument of such simple materials as the place afforded, to the memory of this heavenly vision, which he was desirous thus to impress forever on his heart. The difference of the expression in the eleventh verse, "he took of the *stones* of the place, and put them for his pillows," and in the eighteenth, "he took the *stone* that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it,"† has given occasion to one of the Jewish Rabbins to attempt a reconciliation by a fiction of his own brain. Jacob, he says, having chosen out just three *stones* over night, to support his head, found them all joined into one the next morning; which, he pretends to allege, was a signification of the strict and solid union which subsisted between God and Jacob. And some later interpreters, though aided by the superior light of the gospel dispensation, have been simple enough to adopt this fable, and to explain it, some, of the ineffable union of the three persons who are the object of our worship; others, of the conjunction of the soul, body and deity in the person of Jesus Christ.

It appears that Jacob intended simply to record, in such characters as his situation afforded, that night's important transaction. He sets up the stone, or stones, upon which his head had reposed when visited with the visions of the Almighty, in the form of a rustic pillar, and solemnly anoints, and thereby consecrates it, to the honour of God, by the name of Bethel, that is, "the house of God;" and over it, thus dedicated, he afresh and voluntarily enters into solemn covenant with God, obliging himself by a

* Gen. xxviii. 17. † Gen. xxviii. 18.

sacred vow, to acknowledge and worship none but him; committing himself with filial confidence to the protection of his gracious providence; trusting the time and manner of his return to the care of infinite wisdom; promising ever to consider this monumental pillar as an altar devoted to the service of God; and binding himself, by an explicit declaration, to devote to pious uses the tenth part of whatever he should through the divine blessing acquire. By the way, the oil wherewith he consecrated his pillar was undoubtedly part of the slender provision made for his journey; and apparently a little bread and oil was all he could possibly carry with him. But of that little he cheerfully spares a portion for the purposes of religion; for the possession of a truly pious soul is small indeed, if it bestow nothing when charity, mercy or devotion give the call.

With what alacrity does he now prosecute his journey! What a change in his condition produced in one short night! When "the heart is established by grace," difficult things become easy; the valley is exalted, and the hill laid low; the crooked becomes straight, and the rough places plain." Nothing that the sacred historian deemed worth recording, occurred during the remainder of this pilgrimage. Jacob at length arrived "in the land of the people of the east." And now, no doubt, he flatters himself that all his troubles and mortifications are at an end. His grandfather's servant, Eleazer, had been happy enough to finish a marriage treaty for his master's son in a few hours conversation; surely then the heir of the same family may be equally successful when making personal application for himself. Ah, blind to futurity! Strange, unaccountable difference in the divine conduct towards different persons! Jacob must earn that by long fourteen years servitude, which Abraham's servant was so successful as to accomplish in the pronouncing of almost as many words.

But

But here we must make another pause, and leave the next sweet scene of Jacob's life, and the sequel of it, to another Lecture. But we must no longer defer, the beginning at least, of that parallel which is one object among others, if not the chief, in these exercises.

Jacob was destined of Providence to power and precedency before he was born. Jesus is declared the Son of God, and the heir of all things, by the angel who announced his miraculous conception and birth to his virgin mother. Jacob, the last in order of nature, but first in the election of grace, prefigures him, who, appearing in the end of the world, is nevertheless "the first-born among many brethren." Jacob, hated and persecuted of his brother, is an obvious type of him who was to come, "despised and rejected of men;" crucified and slain by the impious and unnatural hands of those who were his bone and his flesh. Jacob, dismissed with blessings by his father from Beer-sheba, points out to us Jesus leaving heaven's glory, and the bosom of the Father, in compliance with the eternal decree, to become a wanderer in our world; "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The object of Jacob's journey and of Christ's is one and the same. Jacob, to procure for himself a believing spouse, to become the fruitful mother of an elect offspring; Jesus, to purchase for himself, at the price of his own blood, "the church, which is his body, to espouse it to himself as a chaste bride," united to him in everlasting bands of interest and affection. Jacob, deserted and solitary in the plain of Bethel, is a shadow of Christ forsaken of all in the wilderness of this world, yet not "alone, but his heavenly Father always with him." The vision of the ladder has already spoken for itself. What then remains but to add, Jacob's covenant, consecration and vow are so many different representations of Christ's covenant of redemption; his unction by the Spirit to the execution of his high office; and not

the tithe, but the whole of his vaſt and glorious acquiſition rendered unto God even the Father: when the kingdom is finally delivered up to "him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, that God may be all in all."

I add no more but my moſt fervent prayers to Almighty God—That by night and by day, alone and in ſociety, when you ſleep and when you wake, in proſperity and in adverſity, you may be ſtill with God; and that "the Almighty may be your refuge, the Moſt High your habitation," and "underneath" and around you "the everlaſting arms." Amen.

Hiſtory of Jacob.

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS xxix. 20.

And Jacob ſerved ſeven years for Rachel: and they ſeemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

THE great Author of our nature has wiſely and wonderfully adapted the various objects which ſucceſſively ſolicit our attention and engage our purſuit, to the different periods of our life, the different and ſucceſſive affections of our heart, the different ſtations which we have to occupy, and the duties which we are bound to perform. Human life, in ſo far as nature predominates over it, does not conſiſt of violent and ſudden tranſitions, but of calm, gentle, imperceptible changes: like the gradual progreſs of the day, from the morning dawn to meridian ſplendour; and thence gradually back again, to the glimmering twilight of the evening, and the ſhades of night. We emerge not at once from infancy into manhood; we ſink not in a moment from manhood into old age. We grow, and we decline, without perceiving any alteration. Betwixt the giddineſs and inconſideration of childhood, and the ſerious cares and employments of mature age, there is a middle and an important ſtage of life, which connects the two. And there is a paſſion happily ſuited to it, which contains and unites the ſpirit of both; a paſſion which blends the vivacity and impetuoſity of the boy with the gravity and thoughtfulneſs of the man: that noble, generous

rous passion, which the great God has implanted in our nature, to attract, unite and bless mankind; and which, therefore, the pen of inspiration has not disdained, in its own inimitable manner, to describe. It was this passion which speedily compensated to Jacob the loss of his father's house and the pains of a tedious journey; which sweetened and shortened seven long years of hard and mortifying servitude; but which, at the same time, anticipated both the cares and the delights of future life.

Jacob, cheered and supported by the recollection of his vision at Bethel, and animated with the hope of a happy meeting with his friends and relations at Padan-aram, goes on his way rejoicing; and, guided, protected and sustained by an indulgent Providence, he arrives in safety. It was that simple, innocent and happy age of the world, when the chief occupations and enjoyments of human nature were seen in the shepherd's life; while as yet, gold had not settled the price of every other production of the natural world, nor determined the importance of all intellectual endowments; while as yet, commerce had not opened her ten thousand channels of luxury, to enervate, corrupt and destroy mankind. His conversation with the shepherds of Haran* must always afford exquisite delight to those, whose taste, undebauched by the frippery of modern manners, and the affectation of ceremony and compliment, can relish the honest simplicity of nature, and the genuine expression of unaffected, unsophisticated kindness and benevolence. From them he has the pleasure of hearing that his kinsman Laban lived in the neighbourhood, and was in health; and that his daughter Rachel was every moment expected to come to the watering-place, with her father's flock. While they are yet speaking, Rachel, beautiful as the opening spring, and innocent as the lambs she tended, draws nigh with her fleecy charge. With what admirable propriety and skill do

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* Gen. xxix. 1—8.

the holy scriptures represent the most distinguished, exalted and amiable female characters, engaged in virtuous, humble, useful employments! Sarah, baking cakes upon the hearth, for the entertainment of her husband's guests; Rebekah, drawing water for the daily use of her brother's family, and the refreshment of the weary traveller; and Rachel, feeding her father's sheep. O that ye knew, my fair friends, wherein your true dignity, value and importance consisted! They consist in being what God from the beginning intended you to be, "an help meet for man;" not the mere instrument of his pleasure, nor the silly idol of his adoration.

Jacob, with the ardour natural to a manly spirit, and the zeal of an affectionate relation, runs up to salute and assist his fair kinswoman. Little offices of civility are the natural expression of a good and honest heart; they often suggest the first sentiments of love, both to those who confer, and to those who receive them; and they keep love alive after it is kindled. The meeting of that day, and Jacob's natural, easy, officious gallantry, in relieving Rachel, on their very first rencounter, of the heaviest part of her pastoral task, inspired, I doubt not, emotions very different from those which the mere force of blood produces; and were, I am sure, recollected by both, with inexpressible satisfaction, many a time afterward. And little do I know of the female heart, if it would not much rather be wooed with the attentions and assiduities of an agreeable man, than by the prudent and disgusting formalities of settlements and deeds and reversions. Rebekah was courted by proxy, with presents and promises; Rachel, by her destined husband in person, with the looks, and the language, and the service of love. Betwixt the union of Isaac and Rebekah, that match of interest and prudence, no obstacle, except the trifling distance of place, interposed; but many difficulties occurred to retard, to prevent and to mar the union of Jacob and Rachel, founded in esteem,

teem, and prompted by affection. They become insenſibly attached to each other. For love does not give the firſt warning of his approach to the parties themſelves. But it did not long eſcape the penetrating, ſelfiſh eye of the crafty father and uncle; who, from the moment he obſerves this growing paſſion in his nephew and daughter, caſts about how beſt to convert it to his own advantage.

Jacob had frankly told him his whole ſituation, and laid open all his heart. He informed him, that he had indeed purchaſed the birth-right, and obtained the prophetic bleſſing; but that through fear of his brother he had been conſtrained to flee from home, and to ſeek protection in Syria. This was, by no means, a ſituation likely to engage the attention and to procure the kindneſs of a worldly mind. An empty, nominal birth-right, and a bleſſing which promiſed only diſtant wealth, were very ſlender poſſeſſions, in the eye of covetous Laban. He could not help comparing the ſplendid retinue of Eleazer, ſeeking a wife for his maſter's ſon, with the ſimple appearance of Jacob come a courting to his family, with only a ſtaff in his hand; and he finds it greatly to the diſadvantage of the latter. But it is the intereſt of avarice to put on at leaſt the appearance of that juſtice which it ſecretly dreads and hates, if not of that generoſity which it deſpiſes, Jacob had, unſolicited, and without a ſtipulation, hitherto rendered Laban his beſt ſervices for nothing. Indeed he was thinking of but one thing in the world, and that was, how to render himſelf agreeable to his amiable couſin. When, therefore, Laban, who muſt clearly have foreſeen the anſwer, under an affected regard to the intereſt of his relation, inquires into and propoſes the condition of his future ſervices, he without heſitation mentions a marriage with his younger daughter. And, having no marriage portion to give the father, as the cuſtom of the times and of the country required, he offers, as an equivalent, ſeven years perſonal ſervitude and labour.

bour. What is loſs of eaſe, loſs of liberty, loſs of life, to love? When I behold Jacob, at ſuch a price, ready and happy to purchaſe the object of his affection, whether ſhall I pity or contemn the cold, timid, ſelfiſh hearts of the young men of the preſent generation, who perſiſt in the neglect of nature's cleareſt, plaineſt law, from, I know not what, pretended reaſons of caution and wiſdom, which would fain paſs for virtue; but are in reality the offspring of pride and luxury, puſillanimity and ſelf-love.

The propoſal is no ſooner made than accepted. And Laban has the ſatisfaction of at once betrothing his daughter to wealthy Iſaac's ſon and heir, and of ſecuring for himſelf the preſent emolument of Jacob's labour, care and fidelity for ſeven good years. Thus, the rights of humanity, the laws of hoſpitality, and the ties of blood, are all made baſely to truckle to the moſt ſordid and deteſtable of all human paſſions. And behold the free-born grandſon of Abraham ſinks into abject ſervitude, and, the worſt of all ſervitude, ſubjection to a near relation.

But, as every bleſſing of life has its correſponding inconvenience, ſo every evil has its antidote. Jacob is contented and happy, while his pains and fatigue are alleviated by the converſation of his beloved Rachel; and, what is it to him, that the ſtern, diſcontented father frowns and chides, ſo long as the beautiful daughter receives him with complacency and ſmiles? He bears with patience and cheerfulneſs the ardour of the meridian ſun, and the cold chilling damps of the evening, in the hope of that bleſt hour, when tender ſympathy ſhall ſoothe his diſtreſſes, and every uneaſineſs ſhall be lulled to reſt, in the boſom of love. In this ſweet commerce, the years of ſlavery glide imperceptibly away; and, what abſence would have rendered inſupportably long, the preſence of the beloved object has ſhortened into the appearance of a few days. Such is the inconceivable charm of virtuous love. "Jacob ſerved ſeven years for Rachel: and they ſeemed

seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."*

Jacob, having faithfully fulfilled his part of the covenant, now calls on Laban to fulfil what was incumbent upon him. The better to conceal the fraud which he was meditating, he feigns compliance: and believing Jacob is amused with all the usual apparatus of a marriage feast. In conformity to the custom of those eastern nations, the bride was conducted to the bed of her husband, with silence, in darkness, and covered from head to foot with a veil; circumstances, all of them favourable to the wicked, selfish plan, which Laban had formed, to detain his son-in-law longer in his service. Leah is accordingly substituted in room of her sister. And he who by subtilty and falsehood stole away the blessing intended for his brother, is punished for his deceit, by finding a Leah where he expected a Rachel. He who availed himself of an undue advantage to arrive at the right of the first-born, has undue advantage taken of him in having the first-born put in the place of the younger. He, who could practise upon a father's blindness, though to obtain a laudable end, is in his turn practised upon by a father, employing the cover of night to accomplish a very unwarrantable purpose. Laban was base, treacherous and wicked; but Heaven is wise, and holy, and just. Let the man who dares to think of doing evil in the hope that good may come, look at Jacob, and tremble. The shame, vexation and distress of such a disappointment, are more easily imagined than described. And, what are all the votaries of sinful pleasure preparing for themselves? Treasuring up shame and sorrow, when the delirium of passion is over, and the returning light of reason awakens them to reflection and remorse. They thought it "to be Rachel, but in the morning behold it was Leah."

The

* Gen. xxix. 20.

The next day, as may well be ſuppoſed, exhibited a ſcene of no pleaſing kind: expoſtulation, upbraiding, and reproach. Laban, as avarice ſeldom chooſes to avow its real motives, endeavours to juſtify his treachery and breach of faith, by a pretended regard for the laws and manners of his country, which permitted not the younger to be given in marriage before the firſt-born. An honeſt man would have given this information when the bargain was firſt propoſed. It was an inſult, not an imdemnification, to produce it now. What will not this baſe paſſion make a man do? To deceive the unſuſpecting and unwary; to oppreſs the weak; to practiſe upon the ſtranger, are among its ſimpler and more cuſtomary operations. Behold it leading a father, to———by what name ſhall I call it?—proſtitute his own daughter. If there be a crime blacker than another; if, Satan, there be a purpoſe thou wouldſt accompliſh, which modeſty ſhudders to think of, which the hand trembles to perpetrate, from which the conſcience in horror recoils; infuſe into ſome dark heart the demon of covetouſneſs, the love of money; place gain in one eye, proſtitution and parricide in the other, and the work of hell is done.

Mark how eaſy and flexible the conſcience of a miſer is. Let intereſt blow the gale, from whatever quarter it be, and lo, with the rapidity of thought, the underſtanding and conſcience of the covetous wretch are veered round with it! The man, who laſt night ſhuddered at the thought of violating a fooliſh and abſurd faſhion of the country is not aſhamed, the very next morning, to propoſe polygamy and inceſt; and to make his own children the inſtruments of them. Whence this ſtrange inconſiſtency? It was for his advantage to adhere to the cuſtom of the country; and to diſpenſe with the laws of God and nature. What does it concern him, that diſorder and diſtreſs are introduced into his daughter's family, ſo long as it can any how redound to his private benefit? If another

other man have what may be called a weak ſide, avarice is quick-ſighted as the eagle to diſcern it, and not more penetrating to diſcover than dexterous to convert it to its own emolument. Unfortunately, Jacob's infirmity was clear as the ſun at noon. His unextinguiſhed, unabated paſſion for Rachel was well known to her rapacious father; who had, with a joy which the worldly mind alone can feel, ſeen his flocks multiply, and his wealth increaſe, under Jacob's care. Unſatisfied and inſatiable, he builds upon this well-known attachment the project of a farther continuation of Jacob's ſervitude, with all its accumulation of riches and conſequence.

The propoſal which avarice made without a bluſh, love accepted with perhaps too much precipitation. We are not framing an apology for Jacob's conduct, but delivering the features of his character, and the lines of his hiſtory, from the ſacred record. But this much we may venture to affirm, that Jacob, left to himſelf, and to the honeſt workings of a heart inſpired by the love of an eſtimable object, would never have dreamt of a plurality of wives; much leſs of aſſuming the ſiſter of his beloved Rachel, to be her rival in his affections. It does not appear, that the ſolemnization of Jacob's marriage with Rachel, was deferred till the expiration of the ſecond term of ſeven years. Provided Laban got ſufficient ſecurity for performance of the agreement, it was indifferent to him when the other got poſſeſſion of the bride. It is probable, therefore, that he gave way immediately to Jacob's wiſhes; and the more ſo, that his buſineſs was likely to be executed with greater fidelity and zeal, by a ſervant and ſon gratified, indulged and obliged, than by one ſoured by diſappointment, diſſatisfied and irritated by unkindneſs and deceit. Behold then Jacob, at length, at the ſummit of his hopes and deſires. After much delay, through many difficulties, which have ſtrengthened, not extinguiſhed affection, Rachel is at laſt his wife.

But

But alas, human life admits not of perfect bliss! The seeds of jealousy and strife are sown in Jacob's family. The wife who enjoyed the largest share of the husband's affection, is doomed to sterility; the less beloved, is blessed with children. Thus, a wise and gracious Providence, by setting one thing against another, preserves the prosperous from pride and insolence, and the wretched from despair. Twenty years did Isaac and Rebekah live in wedlock without a child, though the inheritance and succession of all Abraham's wealth and prospects depended upon it; whereas the family of Jacob, a simple shepherd, earning his subsistence by the sweat of his brow, the servant of another man, is built up and increases apace. The good things of life seem, to the superficial and discontented, to be unequally divided; but there is no balance so exact as that in which all conditions and all events are weighed. The great Governor of the world does not indeed conform himself, in the dispensations of his providence, to the misconceptions and prejudices of short-sighted, erring men; but he is affording ignorant, erring men, if they will but be attentive, perpetual cause to adore and admire his wisdom and justice, his mercy and faithfulness. Leah bears to Jacob, as fast as the course of nature permitted, four sons one after another; and, what is remarkable, not only is the hated wife first honoured with being a mother, but with being the mother of the two tribes destined to the priesthood and to royal dignity; nay, the mother, remotely, of the chosen seed; a dignity after which every mother, since the first dawning of the promise, eagerly aspired.

The fruitfulness of her sister violently excites Rachel's envy. The partiality of Jacob to her, and all his profusion of tenderness, avail her nothing. She is unable to suppress her chagrin and mortification; and, in the bitterness of her heart, forgets both the respect which she owed her husband, and the submission she ought to have paid to the will of God.

"And

"And she said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die."* How odious, how pitiable are the sentiments, the looks and the language of passion, to the calm and dispassionate; nay, to the passionate man himself, when the fit is over, and passion has spent itself! "And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead; who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"† What! and can the anger of Jacob be kindled against his Rachel, his first, his only love; to obtain whom he cheerfully served fourteen years! My fair hearers, presume not too far on the fondness of the men who love you. Be calm, be moderate, be unassuming, be reasonable, be submissive, and ye are every thing. Be arrogant, impetuous, self-sufficient, imperious, unreasonable, and ye sink into nothing. I tremble to think of the dreadful length a woman will go to gratify her own spleen, and to mortify a rival. In truth, she ceases to be a female, where certain feminine points are to be carried; and the leading, distinguishing characteristics of the sex are lost and sunk in the feelings of the individual. What! the jealous, envious Rachel, who found her beloved husband had already one wife too many, to think of throwing another into his bosom! But her too happy sister and rival is to be mortified; and she cares not what pangs it costs her own heart. O my gentle friends, you are yourselves the framers of your own fortunes. Be yourselves, and I will answer for my own sex. But quit the ground on which God and nature have placed you, and you are indeed to be pitied. If I might venture to hazard an opinion, not altogether unwarranted by the history, and which I am convinced by experience to be well founded—you much oftener lose your object by over eagerness than by inattention. You may, now and then, succeed by address, or vehemence, or force; but you will succeed more certainly, and much more pleasantly with

* Gen. xxx. 1. † Verse 2.

with God and with man, by meekneſs, and gentleneſs, and ſubmiſſion.

Thus was Jacob moſt grievouſly wounded, there, where he was moſt vulnerable; moſt violently diſturbed, there, where he promiſed himſelf perfect repoſe. Thus, our heavieſt croſſes ariſe out of our deareſt comforts; and the purſuits of "vanity," iſſue in "vexation of ſpirit." Thus, all things conſpire to give full aſſurance to the children of men, "that this is not their reſt;" and invite them to ſeek "another country, that is an heavenly," where "there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow, nor crying, nor pain," and "God ſhall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

History of Jacob.

LECTURE VIII.

GENESIS XXX. 25—30.

And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. Give me my wives, and my children for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry, for I have learned by experience, that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. And he said, appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. For it was little which thou hadst before I came: and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now, when shall I provide for mine own house also?

THERE is no subject of contemplation more pleasing, more instructive, more composing to the mind, than the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence, in adapting and adjusting, with such consummate skill, the understanding, the dispositions, and the exertions of men, to their various and successive situations, relations, employments and fortunes. What so feeble, so helpless, so necessitous, as a newborn infant? But its proper aliment has accompanied it into the world. Its first cry has awakened ten thousand fond affections in one, who, at the hazard of

of her life, brought it forth, and, at the hazard of her life, is ready to preſerve it. What ſo giddy, raſh, inconſiderate, as youth? But the father is proportionably thoughtful, ſerious and attentive. Man, of all animals, ſtands longeſt in need of ſupport and protection; therefore, natural affection in man is more intelligent and of greater duration than in any other creature. Inſtinct and reaſon unite their force, in aid of the lengthened infancy and childhood of the human race. Parents often, and unjuſtly, complain, that their care and tenderneſs meet not with reciprocal returns of attachment and affection from their children; not conſidering, that this current ſets continually downward, and that the love which we bear to our offspring, nature has intended they ſhould repay, not to us, but to *their* offspring. Do our children grieve and vex us with their levity, and thoughtleſſneſs, and folly? Let us have a little patience. By and by they ſhall become fathers and mothers; and then ſhall they be cured of what now gives us ſo much uneaſineſs; and then ſhall they be grieved, vexed, and mortified, in their turn.

The anxieties which Jacob's diſſenſion with his brother occaſioned to their fond parents are now thickening upon his own head. In the laſt period of his life, we ſaw the honeſt ſhepherd following his ſimple employment with cheerfulneſs and joy; drinking delicious draughts of love from the approving eyes of his amiable ſhepherdeſs; and beguiling the tedious months of ſervitude in converſe with his Rachel, and with the proſpect of that bright hour, which was to crown his hopes, and to reward all his toil. But thoſe ſoft moments have paſſed away, and vaniſhed like a dream; their flight was not perceived; their value is underſtood and prized, after they are forever gone. The cares, and troubles, and apprehenſions of a father now occupy his mind. Jealouſy and ſtrife diſturb his repoſe. Why multiply elaborate arguments againſt the practice of polygamy? Look into

the wretched diſorder and diſcord of thoſe families which have been built upon that unnatural ſyſtem, and be aſſured it is not, cannot be, from Him, who loves the children of men, and all whoſe inſtitutions aim at making them happy. The rival ſiſters, rather than not mortify each other, voluntarily mortify and degrade themſelves, by raiſing their handmaids to a participation of their huſband's bed. Envy and revenge, if they can but hurt an adverſary, regard not the wounds which they inflict at home. Unhappy Jacob! my heart bleeds for him. His time, and labour, and ſtrength, are at the diſpoſal of a ſelfiſh, hard-hearted, inſatiable father-in-law; his very perſon and affections are inſolently ſettled, diſpoſed of, and transferred at the pleaſure of two jealous, wrangling ſiſters: while, behold a family riſing and increaſing upon him, without the power or means of making any proviſion for it. The mind of his beloved Rachel, whom he had earned at the hard price of fourteen years painful ſervice, is ſoured and chagrined by the want of one bleſſing. The labours of the field through the day, are not relieved at night by the tenderneſs of ſympathy and love, but embittered and aggravated by womaniſh altercation and ſtrife. What could have ſupported him but religion?

Leah has, at various intervals, borne Jacob ſix ſons and a daughter: and Rachel's grief and deſpair are at their height, when God, whoſe counſels move not, nor ſtand ſtill, in complaiſance to our deſires or caprices, thinks meet to remove her ſorrow and reproach; and ſhe becomes the joyful mother of a ſon. What ingenious pains the ſilly mothers take, to perpetuate the memory of their jealous ſentiments and contentions, in the names which they impoſe upon their children; impiouſly preſuming to drag in Providence as a party to their quarrel; fooliſhly and wickedly tranſmitting their contemptible hatred and animoſity to the diſturbance and diſtreſs of their poſterity; and madly ſowing the ſeeds of a plague, which might

might one day break out and consume them! O how different the jealous spirit, which at first dictated the names of the twelve heads of the tribes of Israel, from that prophetic spirit which foresaw and predicted their future characters and situations, as it breathed from the lips of their dying father; and, from the mind of God, who was employing female spleen and passion, to declare his own purposes and designs.

About the time of Joseph's birth, it would appear, the term of Jacob's servitude had expired. He now therefore naturally thinks of the home which he had left so long before, and of the obligations which he lay under, to exert himself in the maintenance and provision of his numerous family. He therefore modestly applies to Laban for his dismission. That greedy kinsman, well aware of the advantages which had accrued to him from Jacob's diligence, fidelity and zeal, expresses much regret on hearing this proposal. But, it is not regret at the thought of parting with his daughters and grandchildren: it is not the tender concern of bidding a long farewel to a near relation and faithful servant. No, it is regret at losing an instrument of gain: it is the sorrow of a man who loves only himself.

Hitherto, the profits of Jacob's industry had been wholly his uncle's. He had most ungenerously taken advantage of his nephew's passion for his daughter, to reduce him into a mere drudge for his own interest. From a sense of shame, as well as a regard to interest, he is at length constrained to consent to Jacob's sharing the fruits of his own labour with him. Laban's craftiness had proved too hard for Jacob's candour and integrity; but the wisdom of Heaven, at last, proves more than a match for even the cunning of a Laban. Jacob, whether prompted from above, or instructed by natural sagacity, aided by experience, proposes as his hire, such a part of the flocks which he fed, as should be, in future, produced of a certain description, "the ring-straked, speckled, and spot-

ted,"—which were so few in number, that they might rather be reckoned the sportings than the regular productions of nature. Laban acquiesces without hesitation in this proposal; wondering in himself, I doubt not, that Jacob should be so simple as to make it. An entire separation is accordingly made, without delay, between the cattle of the description which had been stipulated, and the rest of the flock. They are removed, to prevent all occasion of suspicion and complaint, to the distance of a three days journey; and delivered into the custody of Laban's sons, men too like their father to throw any thing into Jacob's scale, either through good-will, neglect or carelessness. Jacob continues to tend the remainder of the flocks, pure from all mixture, and they were by far the greatest part of the stock, for his father-in-law.

The device which he employed, and which seems to have been suggested to him in a dream, is well known to all who read the scriptures. It has been disputed, whether the success of it was in the ordinary course of natural cause and effect, or was entirely produced by a miraculous interposition in favour of our patriarch. Indeed, there seems in it a great deal of both the one and the other. That the female, in the moment of conception, should be more than usually susceptible of strong and extraordinary impressions, and capable of transmitting that impression to her young, so as clearly to mark and distinguish it, is too fully proved by experience, to be denied. But this happens too seldom in the usual walk of nature, to permit us so suppose that the extraordinary increase of Jacob's cattle was in the mere current of things aided a little by human sagacity and skill. That one lamb or kid, should be marked with "the streaks of the poplar, hasel, and chesnut rods," or, that one here and there through the flock should be thus distinguished, we can easily believe to happen without a miracle. But, that the great bulk of the young should bear this signature; that, as the impressing object was

was exhibited or withdrawn, the dams ſhould conceive uniformly and correſpondently, is, on no principle of nature or of art, to be accounted for. The finger of God is therefore to be ſeen and acknowledged in it. Thus was the condition of Jacob ſpeedily and wonderfully changed to the better: "And the man increaſed exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-ſervants, and men-ſervants, and camels, and aſſes."* And thus, the world is inſtructed that he who fears and follows God, will ſooner or later find his reward.

But it ſeems determined of Providence, that Jacob ſhould never find a place of reſt. Lately, he was poor and dependent, and thence anxious in his own mind, and liable to inſult, and unkindneſs, and oppreſſion from others. Now, he is rich and proſperous, and thence expoſed to hatred and envy. And envy, like a plague or a torrent, ſweeps every thing before it. We may eaſily conceive with what watchful jealouſy Jacob's carriage and his charge were obſerved by ſuch men as Laban and his ſons. With what aſtoniſhment and indignation did they behold the beſt and moſt beautiful of the ewes and ſhe-goats bringing forth nothing but "ſpeckled and ſpotted!" Their rage and diſcontent are, for a while, expreſſed by ſullen looks and ſecret murmurs only. At length they become too violent to be ſuppreſſed, and break forth into open ſcurrility and abuſe. The tongue of the gloomy father indeed ſays nothing—What can he ſay? But his averted looks, his glaring, diſſatisfied, indignant eyes, fully declare the anguiſh that preys upon his heart. I confeſs I am malicious enough to enjoy it. I love to ſee the envious man goaded and ſtung by the laſhes and ſnakes of his own dark, empoiſoned conſcience; becauſe I love to ſee mankind happy. It gives me pleaſure to ſee the generous rival of a ſordid miſer, ſurpaſſing him in wealth, eclipſing

* Gen. xxx. 43.

ing him in eſtimation and ſucceſs; galling him by his proſperity and liberality.

Jacob, however, is unable to ſtand it. And, judging it better for all parties that they ſhould ſeparate, to ſave himſelf the diſtreſs of encountering the bitter words and ſour looks of unkind relations, and to ſpare them the miſery of witneſſing his growing proſperity, he propoſes to return to his aged kind parents, from whom he was certain of meeting with a cordially affectionate reception.

The dialogue which paſſed between Jacob and his wives upon this occaſion,* lets us deeper into the diſtreſſes and diſcomforts of his preſent condition; and exhibits the picture of a covetous man in ſtill livelier, but therefore the more odious colours. From it we learn, that the ſordid father, not contented with exacting of his ſon-in-law the rigorous performance of his hard bargain, according to the rules of ſtrict juſtice, (and the juſtice of a miſer is ſtern, unfeeling, and ſevere indeed) frequently had recourſe to trick and chicane to over-reach and defraud him. No fidelity could pleaſe, no ſubmiſſion mollify, no attachment ſubdue, no tie of juſtice bind, no call of nature awaken his impenetrable, ſelfiſh heart. "Ye know that with all my power I have ſerved your father. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God ſuffered him not to hurt me."† "And Rachel and Leah anſwered and ſaid unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's houſe? Are we not counted of him ſtrangers? For he hath ſold us, and hath quite devoured alſo our money."‡ Whom do men commonly cheriſh and love with peculiar tenderneſs? Their daughters and grandchildren. For whom do men uſually ſave, and gain, and lay up in ſtore? For their daughters and grandchildren. But behold, here is a father who has ſold his daughters for hire, who treats them as ſtrangers

* Gen. xxxi. 4—16. † Gen. xxxi. 6, 7. ‡ Ver. 14, 15.

gers to his blood, defrauds them of their undoubted right! Behold a grandfather taking pleasure, not in the innocent prattle, not in the dawning genius, not in the increasing stature of the young ones who descended from his own loins; not in smoothing for them the rugged path of life, not in extending and brightening their prospects, not in rearing and establishing their fortunes! but, in diverting the streams of their subsistence; but, in grasping to himself the hard-earned fruits of their father's industry; but, in undermining, counteracting, destroying their interests and their hopes! How happy it is for the world, that this vile passion is neither immortal nor omnipotent!

God is, in spite of Laban, fulfilling to Jacob the covenant and promise which he entered into at Bethel. Jacob had stipulated but moderate things for himself, "bread to eat and raiment to put on," whilst he was from home; and a peaceable and safe return to his father's house: and lo, an indulgent Providence has far exceeded his expectations, and even his desires. But, if he be increased, he is also encumbered; if his stock be larger, so is also his care; have his comforts multiplied? he is but the more vulnerable. A retinue, consisting of two wives and as many concubines; twelve children, the eldest but thirteen years old, and the youngest under seven; of the servants necessary to a family so numerous; of a live stock so extensive, to be removed, and of the attendants absolutely needful for that purpose; a family such as this, was in a condition very unfavourable to the journey which they are about to undertake, especially, liable as they were to be pursued and overtaken by incensed Laban; or, intercepted and cut off by the way, by the equally incensed Esau. But, Jacob is following the direction of Heaven, and therefore proceeds with humble confidence. What a destroyer of human comfort is wealth, that universal object of pursuit! See, it has alienated the affections of one man from

from his own family; it has driven another to flee from that person as an enemy, whom he had once sought unto as a friend. In one shape or another, this evil affection, the love of riches, is, I am afraid, at the bottom of most of the ill we do, and of most of the ills which we suffer.

Jacob, having communicated his intention to his family, and obtained their hearty concurrence, takes advantage of Laban's occupation in the business of his sheep-shearing, to steal away homeward. And he has the felicity of gaining three days journey, before the news of his flight have reached the uncle. But encumbered as he was, this is but a slight advantage, if a pursuit were attempted; and he must be indebted for his safety, after all, to the protection of that God whom he was following, and not to his own wisdom, foresight, speed or force.

Jacob, I dare say, was scrupulously careful to remove nothing but what was, by a clear and undoubted title, his own. He who had repeatedly and patiently submitted to imposition and oppression, for the sake of quietness, was not likely to provoke enmity, and justify vengeance, by robbery and plunder. But Rachel, in what view, and for what reason, it is not easy to determine, has "stolen away the images which were her father's." Many solutions have been attempted, of this strange and unaccountable piece of theft. Some of them I shall just mention, leaving you to form your own judgment of the matter. It is alleged by some Rabbins, that she carried off the Teraphim or idols, lest her father by consulting them, should discover the route which Jacob had taken, and so pursue with the greater certainty of overtaking him. Some ascribe her conduct to piety and natural affection, as if she meant to make Laban sensible of the weakness of deities which would suffer themselves to be stolen away, without giving notice of such a design, and were incapable of making any resistance; thereby hoping

hoping to detach her father from the abfurdity and impiety of idol worſhip. Others, leſs charitably diſpoſed towards her, repreſent her as a true daughter of Laban, inſtigated by covetouſneſs, to purloin the deities, for the value of the precious materials of which they were compoſed, or whereby they were ornamented. And Chryſoſtom, with almoſt equal ſeverity, accounts for the robbery from her predilection in favour of idolatry.

Thus Jacob left his father-in-law: or, to uſe the marginal reading, which is ſufficiently warranted by the Hebrew words, "ſtole away the heart of Laban the Syrian;" that is, either he acted with ſo much prudence and caution, that Laban ſuſpected not, fathomed not his deſign; or, he ſtole away that which was dear to him as his heart and ſoul, his precious, precious wealth. The ſequel abundantly juſtifies this latter interpretation. For Laban is no ſooner informed of his ſon-in-law's eſcape, than, without the ſhadow of a pretence to moleſt him on his way, or to force him back, makes after him with a powerful body of his friends, if not to plunder and murder him, at leaſt, to oblige him to return. After ſeven days haſty marching, he overtakes him and his cumberſome train, in Mount Gilead; and he is ready to ſeize on his defenceleſs prey. But, the God in whom Jacob truſted, plants around him a fence more impenetrable than the adamantine rock. Laban's gods could not hinder themſelves from being ſtolen away by a ſimple woman, and packed up among other lumber, to be conveyed off: but Jacob's God is watching and protecting him night and day; nay, watching his enemy too, to check and repreſs him. For, the viſion of the Almighty, is not only with them that fear him, to direct and comfort them, but ſometimes alſo with them that fear him not, to reſtrain, to threaten, and to terrify them.

God, in a dream by night, charges Laban, in a manner

manner which he could not but understand, feel and remember, charges him at his peril to offer Jacob any injury in word or deed; "for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemy to be at peace with him." Thus warned, he comes up with his nephew next morning; and, like many, who when they are galled by an ill conscience, endeavour to ease themselves of its reproaches, by transferring the blame from themselves to the persons whom they have wronged; he reproaches Jacob with a conduct, which, he well knew, had resulted entirely from his own harshness and severity; and upbraids him with unkind behaviour to his daughters, fully convinced all the while, that they had no ground of complaint against any one, so much as against their own unnatural, unkind father, who had counted them as strangers: "for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money."

It is pleasant to hear a miserly wretch talk of the liberal and generous things which he *intended* to have done, after the call and occasion are over, and his generosity is in no danger of being brought to the test. "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me? and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Thou hast now done foolishly, in so doing."* But truth will appear through the closest disguise. With all this pompous parade of kindness and affection, he is weak enough to avow the violent purpose with which he had undertaken the pursuit, and, from his father-in-law's own lips, Jacob has the satisfaction to learn that he owed his safety to the kind interposition of a heavenly, not to the altered mind of an earthly parent.

But, figure to yourselves Jacob's surprise, when charged by Laban with having stolen his gods. If there

* Gen. xxxi. 27, 28.

there was a thing about Laban's house more odious and contemptible than another in his eyes, it was his Teraphim. He would justly have reckoned such an impure mixture among his goods as the corrupter and destroyer of the whole. His defence therefore is simple, yet forcible; because it is the language of genuine truth, and of conscious innocence and integrity. I like Jacob's speech throughout.* It is the language of a good and honest heart. Your time permits me not to make any commentary upon it. Indeed it needs none. Observe only, in general, how generous is the fear which he expresses, lest Laban should violently resume the wives whom he had given him. Some of them had been obtruded upon him by fraud, others by persuasion; but they are the mothers of his children, and therefore he cannot bear to think of parting with them, though he might have been permitted. How noble is the disdain and indignation which he expresses, on being charged with the theft of Laban's gods! How manly the recapitulation of his past services and sufferings! How bold the defiance he bids to malice and resentment!

But, it discovers too much of a great and generous spirit, to be passed over thus slightly. I must therefore take the liberty to resume it, and to enlarge a little upon it,—and now hasten to conclude, with this single idea, of the analogy which we never wish for a moment to lose sight of. Jacob, leaving Canaan, solitary and poor, banished from his father's house, and degraded into slavery: and Jacob, returning, loaded with the spoils of churlish Laban, and blessed with a numerous, prosperous and increasing family, without a violent stretch of thought, prefigures to us —Jesus, descending from heaven, and the original splendours of his nature; voluntarily depressing himself into the form of a servant, and meekly submitting, for a season, and to accomplish a great and important purpose,

* Gen. xxxi. 36—42.

purpose, to the want of the smiles of his heavenly Father's countenance: and "the glory that followed" —his triumphant return to heaven, adorned with the spoils of death and hell, and attended by an innumerable train of spiritual sons and daughters, *acquired* in a strange land, adopted into the family of God, constituted the heirs of glory, and in due time to be exalted, together with their glorious Head, to heavenly thrones. May we, beloved, swell the triumph of that day, and find eternal rest from the toils and dangers of the way, in the bosom of our Father and our God. Amen.

History of Jacob.

LECTURE IX.

GENESIS xxxii. 9, 10, 11.

And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

THE man who is instructed to "acknowledge God in all his ways," and he only, has found out the road that leads to true happiness. The cup of prosperity wants its choicest ingredient when the love of our heavenly Father is not tasted in it. The bitterest potion, when mingled by his hand, we can drink with confidence and cheerfulness. It is pleasant to a man to see his own sagacity and diligence crowned with success. But very imperfect is that pleasure unless he can look up and say with submission and gratitude, "the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow therewith." There is a virulence in the ills which we bring upon ourselves, or which flow from the unkindness and injustice of others, that corrodes the heart, and depresses the spirit;

spirit. But calamity the appointment of Heaven, calamity the discipline of a Father's care and wisdom, brings its own relief along with it. The very poison, if administered by his hand, becomes its own antidote, and what threatened to kill, effects a cure.

It would greatly tend to improve our wisdom, to promote our piety, and increase our pleasure, to take frequent and particular reviews of our own life; and to observe the changes which have taken place in our circumstances from time to time, in connexion with the means and instruments which Providence more clearly or more obscurely has employed, and through which our enterprizes have succeeded or failed. Many, very many, have arrived at situations to which once in their lives they durst not have presumed to aspire. But their present elevation and prosperity want their brightest ornament and their firmest support if they be destitute of that spirit which good Jacob breathes in the words which I have read—that spirit which ascribes every acquisition, every blessing to the wonder-working hand of indulgent Heaven.

Few men have experienced greater varieties, greater reverses of condition than our patriarch. But we find him perpetually gathering strength from the hardships which he endured, supporting a life of uninterrupted, unutterable affliction with patience and fortitude, suffering and feeling as a man but enduring and overcoming as a saint, and at length closing the extended scene of woe with the triumph of a believer exulting in the bright, unclouded prospects of immortality.

One general remark may be applied to his whole history. His deepest distresses sprung out of his choicest comforts; his most signal successes took their rise from his heaviest afflictions. The attainment of the birth-right and the blessing drove him into banishment; the labour, watchfulness and anxiety of a shepherd's life conducted him to opulence and importance. The elevation which he too eagerly grasped at was the cause

cauſe of his depreſſion; the humiliation to which he voluntarily and patiently ſubmitted became the foundation of his future greatneſs. The partial fondneſs of a mother expoſed him to the unnatural unkindneſs and ſeverity of an uncle; the jealouſy and envy of malevolent and ſelfiſh brothers-in-law forced him back to the calm delights of his father's houſe.

After twenty years hard ſervice under Laban, which that ungenerous kinſman repaid with harſhneſs, injuſtice and deceit, but which God was pleaſed bountifully to reward by a numerous and thriving progeny and large poſſeſſions, he ſets out ſecretly, in order to ſhun the mortification which he daily endured, for the land of Canaan. He is hotly purſued, and with hoſtile diſpoſitions, by his father-in-law, and overtaken, encumbered as he was, on the ſeventh day in Mount Gilead. Providence once more interpoſes in his behalf, and protects him from Laban's fury. Charged with undutifulneſs and diſreſpect, and accuſed of a robbery which he would rather have died than commit, he defends himſelf with the ſpirit of a man, with the dignity of conſcious innocence, and the awful ſuperiority of truth and virtue. Thoſe who have a taſte to reliſh the modeſt, manly, ſimple, pathetic eloquence of a good and honeſt heart, will, I am perſuaded, find much pleaſure in the peruſal of Jacob's reply to Laban's accuſation. "And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban; and Jacob anſwered and ſaid to Laban, What is my treſpaſs? What is my ſin, that thou haſt ſo hotly purſued after me? Whereas thou haſt ſearched all my ſtuff, what haſt thou found of all thy houſehold ſtuff? Set it here before my brethren, and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy ſhe-goats have not caſt their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beaſts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loſs of it; of my hand didſt thou require it, whether ſtolen by day, or ſtolen by night,

night. Thus I was, in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction, and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight."* The power of truth is irresistible, and even Laban, though with an ill grace, is constrained to yield to it; and matters are at length amicably settled to their mutual satisfaction. To prevent as much as possible all future ground of fear and suspicion, a covenant of peace and good will is ratified between them, with all the solemnities of a sacrifice, an oath, a monumental pillar, and a feast of love. In the whole of which transaction we cannot help remarking that Laban, the party who had the wicked intention and the guilty conscience, is the first to propose, and the most eager to employ the awful formalities of compacts, and promises, and oaths. He knew that he himself needed to be thus bound, and therefore judges it necessary thus to bind the other. Laws are made for the violent and injurious, covenants for the false and perfidious. The light of an upright heart is its own law, the conscience of an honest man his own faithful witness, his own tremendous judge. What is the opinion of the world to conscious integrity? "The conscious mind is its own awful world." Guilt is timorous, jealous and suspecting; innocence bold, believing and generous. Laban employs the most words; Jacob has the purer and more righteous intention. Laban does justice, not from a regard to duty, but through fear of detection and punishment; Jacob speaks and practises truth because he loves it. The form of religion is employed by

* Gen. xxxi. 36—42.

by Laban to perfect the security which he wanted; Jacob scruples not to superadd the form where he felt the force of the obligation. Laban swears, that he might hold the other fast; Jacob, because he fears an oath, and is willing at once to satisfy the other and to bind himself. Laban, an idolater, calls to witness the gods whom the ancestors of Abraham and Nahor served "beyond the flood;" Jacob, a worshipper of the living and true God, swears by "the fear of his father Isaac," the God who has power to save and to destroy.

The agreement being thus solemnly ratified, and the hour of separation at length come, they part with mutual satisfaction—Laban, with the self-gratulation of having made a virtue of necessity; and Jacob, well pleased to have escaped so happily from a danger so threatening. Laban returns with his train to Haran, and we hear of him no more. And little does it signify what became of an old miserly knave whose name had been better blotted out of every record than transmitted to posterity with so many notes of infamy upon it. Jacob goes on his way rejoicing toward Canaan, beloved of God, and respected of men.

He has hardly bidden his father-in-law farewel, when we find the angels of God pressing forward to meet him.* The history of these superior beings, and of their commerce with mankind, is so brief, so obscure, and so figurative, as rather to excite curiosity than to gratify it. It serves rather to furnish matter for speculation than to convey distinct, full and exact information. By the *angels* of God who are said to have met Jacob on this occasion, some understand merely human messengers, whether deputed from among his own attendants to examine the country through which he was to travel, or some friendly strangers directed that way of Providence to warn him of the approach of his brother Esau. But we cannot materially err by taking the words of Moses

* Gen. xxxii. 1.

in their literal acceptation and according to the more obvious sense which they convey. "Wherefore should it be thought a thing incredible," that the same merciful God who condescended to visit Jacob's sleep at *Bethel* with a vision of angels ascending and descending from heaven to earth, to cheer and encourage his solitary progress to Haran, should vouchsafe to bless his waking thoughts at *Mahanaim* with a visit of these ministering spirits in a bodily form, to be the image and the assurance of the divine favour and protection in every hour of danger, in every time of need? What had that man to fear from the rage of an incensed brother, though that brother were followed by an armed host, around whom "the angels of the Lord encamped" in two hosts or bands.

Whether the history in this passage is to be understood literally or figuratively, whether these angels were human or supernatural beings, this, in either view, well deserves remark, that Jacob was not induced, in confidence of the vision, to neglect any duty of piety or of prudence. Piety dictates the address and recommendation of himself to the God of angels and of men, which we read in the opening of our discourse; and in this he chiefly rested his safety. And prudence made such a wise arrangement of his affairs, as might either gain a brother by kindness, melt him by submission, or oppose him with success. The religion which, aiming at things uncommon, miraculous or preternatural, neglects or despises the plain tract of reason and revelation, is dangerous, and to be suspected. It ministers too much to human vanity; it would establish a standard vague, variable and capricious as the wild imagination of man; and, making every one in matters of faith a law unto himself, would depreciate the "sure word of prophecy," which yields a steady, uniform, and certain light, to illuminate a dark world.

The disposition of his company, which Jacob made, in the view of meeting his brother either as a friend

or

or an enemy, discovers the deepest wisdom and penetration. Every thing that might revive the memory of their ancient grudge is artfully suppressed. If there appear any ostentation of wealth, it is wealth devoted to the use and service of a brother. The message which was put into the mouths of the servants who conducted the droves of cattle, to be successively delivered to Esau, is wonderfully calculated to turn away the wrath of an angry man, "my Lord Esau," "thy servant Jacob." And the present, judiciously intended to disarm and mollify him, is, with equal judgment, exhibited and tendered not all at once, but slowly and gradually; insensibly to steal upon his heart, and imperceptibly to lull all his resentments asleep. He appears voluntarily paying a tribute of duty and affection as to his sovereign, not haughtily exacting submission and acknowledgment as from his vassal. Fear for his own life had driven him, twenty years ago, from the face of Esau, and now that his being is, as it were, multiplied in the persons of so many, dear to him as his own soul, his apprehension increases in proportion.

We cannot but observe, though we need not much wonder at, the partiality discovered in settling the order of this domestic procession. The beloved wife and her darling son are placed in the rear, farthest from danger, if danger there were, because first in the attention and respect of the fond husband and father. Unhappy Jacob! whether shall we pity or blame thee? In this management, I see the dawnings of that unwise and unfortunate preference, which afterwards raised such a tempest in the family, and pierced through the paternal heart with so many sorrows.

The thirty-second chapter of this sacred book concludes with the history of an event in Jacob's life, so very singular and mysterious, as to baffle interpretation, and defy criticism. I mean, his wrestling with a person unknown, in the form of a man, whom he afterwards describes as God, and against whom he

prevailed in the conteſt. If this tranſaction is to be underſtood according to the letter of the narration, the Spirit of God has ſeen meet to withhold the knowledge of ſome particulars which are neceſſary to a clear and diſtinct comprehenſion of it; and the inquirer is ſtopt ſhort, with the reply of the angel who wreſtled, to Jacob's requeſt, "Tell me I pray thee thy name;" "Wherefore is it that thou doſt aſk after my name?"*

The figurative meaning, and the practical intention and application, are more obvious: and it is this indeed with which we have chiefly to do. Jacob was that very morning to meet Eſau, his brother, who was advancing toward him, at the head of four hundred men. Uncertain of his diſpoſition and intentions, conſcious of having given him much cauſe of offence, and appriſed of the menacing and reſentful language which he had formerly held concerning him, he ſhudders to think of the conſequences of this formidable rencounter. And, having firſt poured out his ſoul to God in ſuch a dreadful emergency, and then adopted the meaſures for ſafety which wiſdom and the neceſſity of his ſituation ſuggeſted, he again, it is natural to ſuppoſe, might have recourſe to earneſt prayer and ſupplication, and continue in it during a great part of the night and morning. This, in the forcible and figurative phraſe of oriental language, might be expreſſed "by his wreſtling" with God "to the dawning of the day;" and is at length prevailing ſo far as to obtain from God ſome ſenſible ſign or token, to aſſure him he ſhould be carried through this, as through his other dangers and diſtreſſes, undeſtroyed, unhurt. The ſign given him was calculated at once to expreſs approbation of his faith, fortitude and perſeverance; and to convince him of his inferiority and weakneſs. The unknown wreſtler, though ſeemingly foiled in the combat, by a ſimple touch diſlocates a joint in the hollow of Jacob's thigh,

* Gen. xxxii. 29.

thigh, and thereby disables him from continuing the struggle. Might not the wisdom of God be employing such mystical representation and expression to instruct men in the nature of prayer, and to enforce the obligation of it? "To the end that we should pray always and not faint." Do we prevail in our applications at the throne of grace? It is because our heavenly Father is disposed to yield, and stands out only to heighten our exertions, and call forth our importunity. Have we "power with God, and prevail?" Then, "what is man who shall die, and the son of man who is a worm?" Did Jacob sink and fail in the very moment of victory? We are just what God makes or permits us to be.

Whatever were the real circumstances of this extraordinary scene, it procured Jacob a new and an honourable name, which obliterated to his posterity, if not altogether to himself, that less honourable appellation which commemorated a little, though significant incident attending his birth, and which recorded the infamy of his unfair dealings with his father and brother; *Jacob*, the *supplanter*, is transformed into *Israel*, *a prince with God*.

The vision of the Almighty is scarcely at an end, when the interview with Esau takes place. And we are then fittest for every service, for every trial, when we have settled matters with Heaven. He, who by a touch disjointed Jacob's thigh, could by a word have scattered Esau's host. But behold a greater miracle! By a simple act of his sovereign will, he has in a moment changed Esau's heart. They meet, they converse, they love, as brothers ought to do. And "O how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" We apprehended a strife of fierce and angry looks, of reproachful words, of violence and blood. But how joyful the disappointment! Behold a contention of kindness, a blessed contest of affection; the honest, heart-melting triumph of nature, the noble victory of goodness. Let the proud and

and the resentful perusc, with care, this inimitable scene of tenderness, painted in colours so bright and so touching by the pencil of inspiration,* and say, whether it be possible for any gratification of revenge, any depression of a hated rival, any triumph of violence and blood, to yield any thing that deserves the name of joy, compared with the sweet satisfaction which must have filled the bosoms of this pair of brothers, burying animosity and discord in mutual endearments, and expressions of good will. Ah, why should so many wretched brothers as there are of us, pass through a world in which there is so much unavoidable misery, estranged from one another; or madly, wantonly, wickedly interrupt and disturb each other's passage, by bitterness and wrath! What wretched things are wealth, and pomp, and state, and power, which will not permit brothers to live together in love as they might, and as, but for one or other of these disturbers of human quiet, they would do!

Such scenes as that which now passed between Jacob and Esau ought to have been perpetual. But alas it cannot be! Esau must return to his possession in Mount Seir that very day; and Jacob pursue his journey to Canaan. The paternal roof must no more cover their heads again at one time, nor the affectionate parents enjoy the supreme felicity of witnessing their reconciliation, and of strengthening it by their blessing and their prayers. Let the lower ranks of mankind rejoice, that a gracious Providence, in withholding from them affluence, and station, and distinction, has left them a blessing greater than all put together, friendship, and the means of exercising and enjoying it. Parents, as ye love your children, and wish to have them near you, and to bless you with a sight of their health and prosperity, be moderate in your views and efforts concerning them. Prospects of ambition, or of avarice, will of necessity banish them

* Gen. xxxiii. 4—15.

them from your sight, will separate them from each other, will scatter them upon the face of the earth.

Jacob, by slow movements, as the delicate condition of part of his retinue required, advances homewards in a south-west direction from the ford of Penuel, on the south bank of the Jabbok, towards Jordan; and arrived safe at the ford of Succoth. So called from the *booths* which he erected there, for a temporary repose to himself and family, in the plains of Jordan, about twelve or fifteen miles from Penuel; ten miles south of the sea of Galilee; and five south of the Jabbok, where it runs into Jordan: a city afterward assigned by lot to the tribe of Gad. After resting at Succoth about a month, he proceeds to travel from Jordan west and by south about thirty-five miles, and arrives, in peace and safety, according to the promise and covenant of the God of Bethel, which was ratified more than twenty years before, at Shechem, the city of Hamor the Hivite; of whom he bought a field, in the same place where Abraham first pitched his tent upon coming into Canaan. And there Jacob erected an altar, and dedicated it by the name of *El-Elohe-Israel, God, the God of Israel.* Now this event happened in the year of the world two thousand two hundred and sixty-six; before Christ, one thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight; after the flood, six hundred and ten; from the peregrination of Abraham, one hundred and eighty-three; before Jacob's descent into Egypt, thirty-two; before the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt, two hundred and forty-seven; and in the year of Jacob's life, ninety-eight. Isaac, his aged father, living then at Beer-sheba, one hundred and fifty-seven years old. And this naturally furnishes another resting place in the history of our patriarch.

The next Lecture, if God permit, will resume the subject, and carry it forward to a conclusion. We detain you only for a moment or two, to suggest a few thoughts on the analogy of Jacob and Christ, from this portion

portion of the ſcripture hiſtory. How beautifully and how exactly does the account which Jacob gives of himſelf as a ſhepherd correſpond to the character of "the good ſhepherd who giveth his life for the ſheep!" "This twenty years have I been with thee: thy ewes and thy ſhe-goats have not caſt their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beaſts, I brought not unto thee: I bare the loſs of it. Of my hand didſt thou require it, whether ſtolen by day, or ſtolen by night. Thus I was, in the day the drought conſumed me, and the froſt by night, and my ſleep departed from mine eyes."* "And he ſaid unto him, my lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men ſhould over-drive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, paſs over before his ſervant: and I will lead on ſoftly, according as the cattle that goeth before me, and the children, be able to endure; until I come unto my lord unto Seir."† "He ſhall feed his flock like a ſhepherd: he ſhall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his boſom, and ſhall gently lead thoſe that are with young."‡ Angels, thus miniſtering to the heir of the promiſe, at *Bethel*, at *Mahanaim*, lead our thoughts directly to the *annunciation*, the *nativity*, the *temptation* in the wilderneſs, the *agony* in the garden, the *reſurrection*, the *aſcenſion*, the *ſecond coming* of our bleſſed Lord. The wreſtling at Peniel, is a ſtrong figurative deſcription of the powerful and prevalent interceſſion of the Prince with God, Meſſiah himſelf, whoſe language is not "Father I beſeech thee," but "Father I will." Jacob's ſafe and happy return to Canaan, and to his father's houſe, every enemy being ſubdued either by fear or by love, accompanied with two bands of ſons and daughters, wherewith God had enriched him in the land where he was a ſtranger, and where he had been humbled, and oppreſſed,—prefigures, as has been ſuggeſted in a former

* Gen. xxxii. 38—40. † Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14. ‡ Iſa. xl. 11.

er discourse, the triumphant return of the great Captain of salvation, to his father's house above, loaded with the spoils of principalities and powers: the power of hell vanquished by force, an elect world redeemed and rescued by love. "His right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory:" "he shall reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet," "sing praises to his name, sing praise." "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."* "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."† Amen.

* Psal. lxviii. 8. † Rev. i. 5, 6.

History

History of Jacob.

LECTURE X.

GENESIS xlii. 36, 37, 38.

And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befal him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

IT is a pleasing and an useful employment to trace important events up to their sources; to mark the gradual progress of human affairs; to observe the same persons at different periods of their existence, and in different situations; to discover on what delicate hinges their fortunes have turned; and to contemplate the wisdom, power and goodness of Divine Providence, in producing the greatest effects from the slightest and most unlikely causes. There is no greater error in conduct, than to reckon certain actions relating to morals, trifling and insignificant. When revolutions in private families, and in empires, are pursued up to the springs from whence they flow, they are often found to commence in some little error, inadvertency, or folly, which, at the time, might have been despised or neglected. Just as mighty rivers

ers begin their course in some paltry obscure stream, which the peasant could dry up with the sole of his foot. The past is infinitely less perspicuous to the eye of human understanding, than the future is to divine intelligence. God "seeth the end from the beginning, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfil all my pleasure." The periods which make the most brilliant figure in the page of history, were periods of anxiety and trouble to the men and the nations who then figured on the scene. A life of many incidents is a life of much distress. When the writer has got a great deal to relate, the person whose life is recorded has had a great deal to suffer.

Much more is written of Jacob than of any other of the patriarchs. Alas! it is only saying that his miseries were much more numerous and severe. In a life shorter than his father's by thirty-three years, calamity so crouded upon calamity, that it seems extended to the utmost stretch of even antediluvian longevity. What hour of his mature age is free from pain and sorrow? Not one! In what region does he find repose? No where. Canaan, Haran, Egypt, are to him almost equally inclement. As a son, a servant, an husband, a father; in youth, in manhood, in old age; he is unremittingly afflicted. And no sooner is one difficulty surmounted, one woe past, than another and a greater overtakes him. Formerly he had youthful blood and spirits to encounter and to endure the ills of life. Hope still cheered the heart, and scattered the cloud. But now, behold the hoary head sinking with sorrow to the grave; the spirit oppressed, overwhelmed, with a sea of trouble. Keen recollection summons up the ghosts of former afflictions, and past joys recur, only to remind him that they are gone forever; and black despair obscures, excludes the prospect of good to come. What heart is not wrung, at hearing a poor old man closing the bitter recapitulation of his misfortunes, in the words I have read, "All, all these things are against me?"

Perhaps

Perhaps the life of no other man affords a like inſtance of accumulated diſtreſs. The mournful detail of this evening will preſent, collected within the compaſs of not many months, a ſeries of the heavieſt afflictions that ever man endured; and all ſpringing up out of objects, in which the heart naturally ſeeks and expects to find delight. An only daughter diſhonoured—his eldeſt hope ſtained with inceſt—Simeon and Levi polluted with innocent blood—Judah joined in marriage to a woman of Canaan, and a father by his own daughter-in-law—Joſeph torn in pieces by wild beaſts—his beloved Rachel loſt in childbirth—his venerable father removed from him in the courſe of nature—the miſerable wreck and remains of his family ready to periſh with famine—Simeon a priſoner in Egypt,—and Benjamin, the only remaining pledge of his Rachel's love, demanded and forced to be given up. What ſorrow was ever like this ſorrow? "This is the man who hath ſeen affliction by the rod of his wrath." And does all a partial mother's fondneſs; do all a father's bleſſings, wiſhes and prayers; do all the promiſes and predictions of Heaven iſſue in this? "If in this life only there were hope," who ſo miſerable as God's deareſt children? Whoſe lot is ſo much to be deplored as that of the ſon of Iſaac?

Jacob, after an abſence of more than twenty years, has returned to the land of his nativity. A guardian Providence has protected and delivered him from his avowed enemies, from Laban, and from Eſau; but the moſt dangerous enemies of his repoſe are ſtill nearer to him, they "are thoſe of his own houſe." He has purchaſed an eſtate, he has ſpread his tent, he has erected his altar; "his mountain ſtands ſtrong," what can move him? From what ſlight beginnings do great events ariſe! Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, prompted by female vanity, curioſity, or ſome other motive equally deſerving blame, ventures, unattended, beyond the verge of the paternal ſuperintendence and protection,

protection, and falls into danger and shame. She went out, says the scripture, "to see the daughters of the land." Josephus affirms, that she was attracted by the celebration of a great public festival, according to the manners of the country. Her youth, innocence and inexperience inspire confidence; novelty awakens curiosity; beauty tempts, opportunity favours, and virtue is lost. From the first transgression, down to this day, female disgrace and ruin have begun in the gratification of an immoderate desire to see, and to know, some new thing; from an inclination to exhibit themselves, and to observe others. One daughter of Israel is much more likely to be corrupted by communication with many daughters of Canaan, than they are to be improved by the conversation of that one. There is much wisdom, my fair friends, in keeping far, very far within your bounds. There is danger, great danger, in advancing to the utmost limit of liberty and virtue. For, the extreme boundary of virtue is also the extreme boundary of vice; and she who goes every length she lawfully may, is but half a step from going farther than she ought, or perhaps than she intended.

Desire is commonly extinguished by gratification; but it is also sometimes inflamed by it. And so it was with Shechem. The first disorder of his passion and its effects, are not more to his shame, than the reparation which he intended and attempted, is to his honour. Indeed, if we except the leading step in this transaction, the whole proceeding on the part of the young prince is noble and generous to a high degree; and loudly reproves and strikingly expose the cool, the cruel, the remorseless seducers of a Christian age, and of a civilized country.

The unhappy father receives the news of his daughter's dishonour with silent sorrow. And how often does he wish in the sequel, that he had forever buried his grief in his own heart? Hamor readily adopts the views of his son, disdains not the alliance of a shepherd,

herd, courts Dinah, though humbled, with all the respect due to a princess, and all the munificence becoming one who was himself a sovereign. Those who are fathers, who have daughters for whom they feel, or for whom they fear, will judge of Jacob's satisfaction at this proposal. To have the wound which had been made in the fond paternal heart, instantly closed up; the stain cast upon his name, wiped clean away; his darling child's peace and reputation restored; an honourable alliance formed with a wealthy, virtuous and generous prince; a whole people proselyted from idols to the God of Israel. How many sources of exquisite satisfaction! Is the black cloud over Jacob's head going for once to descend in refreshing drops, is it going for once to burst, and disperse itself into calmness and serenity? Alas, alas! the tempest is only gathering thicker around him; and dreadful must the discharge of it be. I shudder as I proceed.

Simeon and Levi, two brothers german of Dinah, and who, on that account, think themselves peculiarly concerned in the vindication of their sister's honour, affect to receive Shechem's overtures with complacency. They have no scruples but what arise from religion. Let these be removed, and the way is cleared at once. Deep, designing, dissembling villains! The ordinance of God is in their mouths, the malice of the devil lies brooding in their hearts. They recommend a sacrament, and they are preparing a sacrifice, a horrid human sacrifice, of many victims.

There is not a more singular fact in all history, than the ready compliance of the whole inhabitants of Shechem with the proposal of changing their religion, and of receiving, at so late a period in life, the painful sign of circumcision. Great must have been the authority which Hamor had over them, or great the affection which they bore him. Unhappy man! he practised a little deceit in stating the case to his people, but was himself much more grosly deceived. And I greatly question whether he had prevailed, had not

not the temptation of Jacob's cattle and other substance, been held out as a motive to obtain their consent. Comply however they did,—and it proved fatal to them. For on the third day, the two sons of Jacob already mentioned, attended probably by a band of their friends and servants, rushed upon them, and put them all to the sword. "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."* We no where meet with an instance of more savage, indiscriminating barbarity. For the offence of one, a whole nation is mercilessly cut off, and rapine closes the scene of blood. For they plundered the city, and carried off the wretched women captive whose husbands they had murdered. Horrid, infernal passion! And how was Dinah's honour repaired by this? And these simple, easy, believing men, these harmless, unoffending women, what had they done? Daughters of Canaan, dearly have ye bought the favour of a visit from Jacob's daughter. Idle and unhallowed was the opening of the scene, and dreadful has the conclusion been. I should not have been surprised to hear of a confederacy among all the neighbouring states, to exterminate such a band of robbers and murderers from the face of the earth. Jacob is justly alarmed with the apprehension of this, and, warned of God, removes from the neighbourhood of Shechem to Bethel; a spot that brought to his recollection, calmer, happier days—when he was flying indeed from his country, without wealth, without a friend; but free also from the anxiety, vexation and care, which an increased family and abounding wealth have brought upon him. How much better is it to go childless, than have children to be the grief and plague of a man's heart?

Being arrived at Bethel, where he had been blessed with the visions of the Almighty on his way to Padan-aram, he deems it a proper time and place to purge his

* Gen. xlix. 7.

his family of every veſtige of idolatry. It is no eaſy matter to live in an idolatrous, or irreligious country, without loſing a ſenſe of religion, or acquiring a wrong one. This is one of the great evils which attend travelling into diſtant lands. Our young men who reſide long abroad, whatever elſe they bring back to their native country, generally drop by the way the pious principles which were inſtilled into them in their youth. Some very nearly related to Jacob, I am afraid, had a violent hankering after the gods beyond the flood. Why elſe did Rachel ſteal away the images which were her father's? However that may be, Jacob now diſpoſes of them in a proper manner, and buries every ſhred that could miniſter to idolatry, under the oak that was by Shechem. The conduct of Jacob's ſons had, of neceſſity, awakened a hoſtile ſpirit in the country againſt him, which, had it not been providentially reſtrained, muſt have proved fatal to him. But "the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not purſue after the ſons of Jacob."*

About this time, a breach was made in the family by the death of Deborah, Rebekah's nurſe; the threatening and forerunner of a much heavier ſtroke. For, juſt after they had left Bethel, as he was on his way finally to join his father with all his family, with a heart exulting, no doubt, in the proſpect of preſenting to his venerable parents the wives and children which God had given him; Rachel, his much-loved Rachel, is ſuddenly taken in labour by the way ſide, and dies, after bearing another ſon. Unhappy woman! She falls a victim to what ſhe had coveted ſo earneſtly. "Give me children, elſe I die," in her haſte, in the bitterneſs of her heart, ſhe exclaimed. She obtains her wiſh, and it proves fatal to her. God, a righteous God, gives her children, and ſhe dies. Reſentment at her vehemence and impatience is loſt in ſorrow for her loſs.

The

* Gen. xxxv. 5.

The history does not expand itself here, but simply relates the fact. Some causes are injured, not assisted, by a multiplicity of words. The feelings of the patriarch on this occasion are rather to be conceived than described. Rachel early, constantly, tenderly loved; earned with long and severe servitude; endeared by knowledge and habit, and rendered more important and valuable by fruitfulness, could not be lost without pain. It was natural for the dying mother to think of perpetuating the memory of her mortal anguish, by giving the son whom she brought into life at the expense of her own, the name of *Ben-oni*, "the son of my sorrow." It was wise and pious in the surviving father, to preserve rather the memory of the benefit received, than of the loss sustained; and by the name of *Benjamin*, "the son of my right hand," to mark and record submission to, and trust in Providence, rather than seek to perpetuate his grief, by retaining the maternal appellation, which seemed to murmur at and to reflect upon the dispensations of the Almighty. Dying in childbirth, it was found necessary to bury her with greater expedition than the removal of the corpse to the cave of Machpelah permitted; though there the precious dust of Sarah and of Abraham reposed. And, as it is happily ordered by nature, Jacob amuses, soothes and spends his grief, which might otherwise have oppressed and spent him, in erecting a monument to Rachel's memory. Thus, what the heart in the first paroxysms of its anguish, intends as the means of rendering grief lasting or continual, gradually, imperceptibly, and most graciously extinguishes it altogether.

While this wound was still bleeding, the patriarch's heart is pierced through with another stroke, if not so acute, perhaps more overwhelming. Reuben, his eldest hope, raised and distinguished by Providence, placed in the foremost rank among many brethren, degrades and dishonours himself by the commission of a crime which modesty blushes to think of, and "such

as is not so much as named among the Gentiles;" a crime, which blended the guilt and shame of another with his own; which could not make the usual apologies of surprise, temptation or passion for itself. But let us hasten from it. We can sit and weep a while upon the grave of Rachel; but from the incestuous couch of Rueben, imagination flies away with horror and disgust. What a dreadfully licentious, irregular and disorderly family, is the family of pious Jacob! Each of his sons is worse and more wicked than another. Accursed Laban, I see thy infernal avarice at the bottom of all this disorder and wickedness! It was that which first introduced a multiplicity of wives into Jacob's bosom. It was that which created and kept up jarring interests in his family; and gave birth to those unhallowed, disgraceful, headstrong passions, which disturbed his peace, pierced his heart, and dishonoured his name.

An affliction more in the order of nature, and whose certain and gradual approach must have prepared the heart to meet it, at length overtakes him. After an absence of more than twenty years, he rejoins his aged father, now in his one hundred and sixty-third year, at Arbah, afterwards called Hebron, "the city where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." It does not appear whether Rebekah yet lived, or not. If she did, what must have been her feelings at embracing her long-lost, darling son; and at finding him so abundantly increased in children and in wealth? Pure and perfect is the delight of a grandmother, as she caresses the young ones of a beloved child, the heirs and representatives of the husband of her youth, the supporters of his name, prospects and dignity.

In presenting his family to his father, Jacob must have been agitated by various and mixed emotions. It was natural for the old man to inquire minutely into the events of his son's life, during the tedious years of their separation; into the character and qualities of his grandchildren: into the state of Jacob's worldly

worldly circumstances; much more, into the state of his mind as a believer, and the heir of the promise. The answer to these parental inquiries must of necessity have awaked in the bosom of the wretched sufferer ten thousand melancholy and painful sensations; and torn open afresh those wounds which the lenient hand of time had begun to close up. The hardships endured in Padan-aram; the severity, churlishness and deceit of Laban, would rise again to view. And almost every child, as he presented them one by one to his sire, must have suggested some mortifying and distressful circumstance to wring his heart. Dinah, not in the bloom and dignity of virgin innocence, but humbled and dishonoured, robbed of that which makes youth lovely, and age respected—Simeon and Levi, her brothers, polluted with innocent blood; and Reuben, his "first-born, his might, and the beginning of his strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power," stained with incest—Judah, his fourth son, who had begun to build up a family of his own, but it was by a Canaanitish woman,* whose progeny involved him in complicated guilt, and covered him with shame—Joseph and Benjamin, fair as the opening blossoms of the vernal rose, and precious as the purple fluid which visited his sad heart—But alas! the highly valued stock which had shot forth these two lovely branches, is prematurely cut down and withered. His beloved Rachel is no more; and he is deprived of even the poor consolation of reflecting, that her sacred dust slept in the same tomb with that of his venerable ancestors. But to have the privilege of pouring his sorrows into the bosom of a father, was the alleviation if not the cure of them. And he, who by meditation, and faith, and prayer, had overcome the world, and lived so long in heaven, was well qualified for administering the vivifying cordial to the fainting soul, to apply

* Gen. xxxviii. 2, 18, 24, 25, 26.

the ſovereign balm to the aching heart of a ſon, who had been a ſtill greater ſufferer than himſelf.

But the calamities of neither the father nor the ſon are as yet come to a period; and they have ſtill to interchange ſorrows for a loſs more bitter and oppreſſive than any which they have yet endured. For, in little more than ſix years from their re-union; while Iſaac, now one hundred and ſeventy years old, was patiently looking for his diſmiſſion from this ſcene of trouble, and preparing to enter the harbour of eternal reſt—he is driven back upon the tempeſtuous ocean, and doomed to toil and grieve ten years more of a weary life, deploring an affliction which admitted of no conſolation, and which at length brought his white head with ſorrow to the grave. At this period it was, that Joſeph, beautiful and young, Joſeph, the delight of God and man, Joſeph, the memorial of Rachel, the pride of Jacob, the prop of Iſaac's old age, diſappeared, and was heard of no more, till many years after his venerable grandſire ſlept in the duſt.

Jacob, ſinking himſelf into the duſt, under the preſſure of a burthen which nature was unable to ſuſtain, is at length called to perform the laſt ſad office of filial affection, and to lay his hand upon the already extinguiſhed orbs of his honoured father; willing, and longing, I am perſuaded, to have deſcended with him into the grave. But not the leaſt eventful part of his hiſtory is yet to come. It will henceforward be blended with that of Joſeph, which now ſolicits our attention. O could we but bring to the ſtudy and diſplay of it, a ſmall portion of that native ſimplicity, that divine eloquence, that celeſtial energy, which glow and ſhine upon the page of inſpiration! with what delight and ſucceſs ſhould we then ſpeak, and with what pleaſure and profit ſhould ye then lend a liſtening ear!

The ſtory of Jacob, as it proceeds, teaches many uſeful leſſons for the conduct of life; and opens many ſources

sources of religious instruction. Who would not rather be honest, unsuspecting, believing Jacob, than dark, designing, selfish Laban? And yet, who does not see the necessity of blending the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove? We mourn to think on the prevalence of those fiery and ungovernable passions which separate, and scatter, and alienate those whom God and nature designed to live together, and to love one another; and which robs human life of many instances of felicity which might have been in it. Why should Isaac and Jacob have lived twenty years asunder, to their mutual discomfort and distress? The vile spirit of this evil world arose; the spirit of pride, emulation, ambition, avarice, fear, revenge, drove Jacob into a miserable exile; and left his father a forlorn, forsaken, anxious, blind old man. Happy that poverty, which permits the parent and his child to cherish each other, till the cold hand of death chill the heart. Happy the obscurity which excludes envy; and forces not a man to be an enemy to his own brother!

We have seen in the patriarch, a man like ourselves, "bruised and put to grief;" the image of "one greater man," "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," whose woes commenced in the *manger*, and ceased not till they were lulled to rest in the *tomb*. "The Son of Man" who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." "The heir of all things" who emptied himself, and voluntarily assumed "the form of a servant." "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem."* "And Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money, sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them

* Gen. xxxv. 4.

them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen, and poured out the changer's money, and overthrew the tables: and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."† Jacob presented to his father a numerous and thriving offspring; but many of them children perverse and corrupted, their father's shame and sorrow. But when our spiritual Head shall present his redeemed to "his Father and our Father, to his God and our God," saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me," the parental eye shall discern in them "neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing." Our Father in heaven ever lives, "exalted that he may shew mercy;" our "Redeemer liveth," "he is risen again, he is even at the right hand of God, he also maketh intercession for us."

† John ii. 13—16.

History

Hiſtory of Jacob and Joſeph.

LECTURE XI.

GENESIS XXXVII. 3, 4.

Now Iſrael loved Joſeph more than all his children, becauſe he was the ſon of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren ſaw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not ſpeak peaceably unto him.

THE hiſtory of mankind exhibits an unceaſing contention between the folly and wickedneſs of man, and the wiſdom and goodneſs of God. Men are continually ſtriving to outdo, to mortify, and to hurt one another; but a gracious Providence, by oppoſing ſpirit to ſpirit, intereſt to intereſt, force to force, preſerves the balance, and ſupports the fabric. His ſovereign power and matchleſs ſkill, produce exquiſite harmony from the confuſed, the contending, the diſcordant tones of human paſſions. He controls and ſubdues a diverſity, which threatened diſorder, ſeparation and deſtruction, into a variety which pleaſes, which unites, which cements and preſerves mankind. And a more conſolatory, a more compoſing, a more ſatisfying view of the divine Providence we cannot indulge ourſelves in, than this merciful ſuperintendence which it condeſcends to take of the affairs of men, and of every thing that affects their virtue or their happineſs. The diſorders which prevail in the natural world, under the ſubduing hand of Heaven, range themſelves into order and peace. The convulſions which ſhake and diſturb the moral world, directed, checked and counterbalanced

terbalanced by a power much mightier than themselves, subside into tranquillity, through the very agitation and violence they had acquired. "Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain." When the tumult is over, and the noise ceases, religion rears up her head, and says, in the words of Joseph to his brethren, "but as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."*

We are now come to a passage of the sacred history of uncommon beauty and importance. Whether we consider the simplicity and grace of the narration, the affecting circumstances of the story, the interesting and instructive views of the human heart which it unfolds, the many plain and useful lessons which it teaches; and the mighty consequences, both near and remote, which resulted to the family of Jacob, to the Egyptian monarchy, and to the human race, from incidents, at first insignificant and seemingly contemptible, but gradually swelling into magnitude, embracing circle after circle, extending from period to period, till at length all time and space are occupied by them.

Isaac was now as good as dead; calmly looking forward to his latter end; alive only to sentiments of piety and of pain. And Jacob was, through much difficulty and distress, at last settled in the land wherein his father was a stranger; increased in wealth, rich in children, rich in piety, but advanced in years, and loaded with affliction. Jacob's family, the salt of the earth, was itself in a very putrid and corrupted state; and the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel were themselves very bad men. The unhappy father endeavours to soothe the anguish arising from the ill behaviour of his grown-up sons, by the pleasing prospects which the more amiable qualities of his younger children opened to him.

The

* Gen. l. 20.

The sacred historian introduces to us the favourite character of Joseph with wonderful art and skill. From the very first moment we become interested in him. He is the long expected son of beauteous Rachel—his mother was dead—he had now attained his seventeenth year—and he was the darling object of his father's affection. Jacob's affection, however, has not blinded him so far, as to bring up even his favourite in idleness. Little does that man consult either the credit or the comfort of his son, who breeds him to no useful employment: for indolence is the nurse of vice, the parent of shame, the source of misery. Unfortunately for him, however, Joseph is associated in employment with persons whose conversation was not likely greatly to improve his morals, and whose dispositions toward him did not promise much to promote his happiness; "the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives;" who alas! seem to have inherited much more of the spirit of the bond woman who was their mother, than of the free man who was their father. What were the particulars of their ill conduct we are not told; but Joseph observed it, was grieved and offended, and reported it to his father.

Jacob is not wholly irreprehensible in this. It was imprudent to trust a well-inclined young man, at that delicately dangerous season of life, far, or long out of his sight, and in such company. It was wrong to encourage in Joseph a spirit of censoriousness and self-conceit. It was madness to add fuel to those resentments, which his ill-disguised partiality to this son of his old age had already kindled in the breasts of his other children. But his understanding seems quite blinded by love for the boy; and he proceeds from weakness to weakness. As if he had not raised up enemies enough to him, by countenancing in him the odious character of tale-bearer, he goes on to expose him to the hatred of all the family, by dressing up his darling in "a coat of many colours."

What

What a foundation of mischief was here laid! The brothers must have been much less inflammable than they were well known to be, not to have taken fire at this indiscreet, this ridiculous distinction. And Joseph himself must have possessed a mind much more firm and more enlightened than seventeen generally discovers, not to have felt at least some transient emotions of vanity, insolence and self-sufficiency, in being thus favoured above the rest. The father was therefore injurious to all, but most to himself. His house is now in flames, and he himself has fired the train. Parents, as ye love your repose, as you value your children, as you would have them dwell together in unity, as ye would not put a dagger into a brother's hand to shed a brother's blood, guard yourselves well against partial affections: or if unhappily you have conceived them, conceal it from every eye, let not the favourite see it, let not his rival suspect it. Let reason, let religion, let that very partiality itself, teach you to be wise and just. Parents, as ye prize the understanding, the virtue, the true dignity of your children, let them never be taught to think that dress confers consequence, that finery implies worth, that the body deserves more attention than the mind. Let not even your daughters be led, through your silly vanity, to believe that any part of their excellence consists in the splendour of their appearance. But still inculcate upon them, that a mind stored with virtues, with modesty, meekness, gentleness, patience, humility, is, both to God and man, a sight infinitely more pleasing than the most beautiful person adorned with jewels and lace, if these, or any of these be wanting. Let them know early, and hear frequently, that cleanliness and decency are virtues which they ought to acquire and to practise; but that a curiously ornamented body is, to a discerning eye, nothing but the indication, and the wretched tawdry covering of a naked soul.

I think

I think I see the ill effect of Jacob's fondness on Joseph himself. What could have suggested those dreams of his own superiority, the recital of which was so offensive to his brothers, and which drew from his father himself check and reproof? Nothing but the petulancy of his waking thoughts, buoyed up by confidence in paternal preference and favour. It will be said, that they were intimations from above of his future greatness and eminence. It is readily admitted. But of what stuff does the foreknowledge and power of God frame prognostics and predictions? Sometimes, perhaps often, of the violent propensities and desires of men's minds. And many events seem to have been predicted, not because they are to come to pass, but they come to pass because they have been predicted. The dreams themselves are the natural working of a young mind, inflated by indulgence. The repetition of them, where they were sure to occasion disgust, marks a simplicity, an innocence, a boyish thoughtlessness and indiscretion, which it were cruel severely to censure, but which wisdom can by no means approve. And, the whole taken together, the prognostic with the realization, the cause with the effect, the prophecy with the event, form a wonderful and instructive contrast of the weakness of man, and the power of God; the meanness of the materials, and the magnificence of the fabric; the feebleness of the instrument, and the force of the hand which employed it.

Though Jacob was not altogether pleased with the spirit which these dreams and the rehearsal of them discovered, yet they had a very different effect upon him and upon his sons. They envied and hated him the more; he "observed the saying." Whether from a father's partial fondness, or instructed by that Spirit, who afterwards disclosed futurity to him, down to the gathering of the people to *Shiloh*, he considered the doubling of the vision, and its coinciding purport, as portending something great and good to his beloved

ed child; and he sits down patiently to wait the issue. And we shall presently find it was hastening towards its conclusion in a course much more rapid, and by means much more extraordinary than any which he could possibly apprehend.

By this time the power of Jacob's family was grown so great, or the terror inspired by the cruel murder of the Shechemites was so far effaced, that his ten eldest sons adventure into the neighbourhood of that city to feed their flocks. The distance from *Beer-sheba*, where Jacob dwelt, being considerable; their absence being extended to a length of time that created anxiety, and though *their* apprehensions might, a solicitous father's anxiety not being quite laid to rest, he thinks proper to send Joseph from Hebron, to inquire after their welfare and to bring him word again. Unhappy father and son! little did they think the parting of that day was to be for such a length of duration. Blind that we are to futurity! We "cannot tell what a day may bring forth." The last meeting, the last parting; the last coming in and going out; the last time of speaking and of hearing; the last of every thing must soon overtake us all. Joseph accordingly leaves his father's house, never, never to return to it more, and goes forth in quest of his brethren.

Our tender affections are now strongly excited for the hapless youth. A lad of seventeen, who had never till now been from beneath the protection of paternal care and tenderness; whose face "the wind of Heaven" had never hitherto "visited too roughly;" whose spirit mortification had never galled, whose heart affliction had never yet pierced,—thrown at once into the wide world, missing his way in an unknown country, exposed to savage beasts, or more savage men; coming at length to the place of his destination, but disappointed of finding what he looked for there; and finally falling into the hands of butchers, where he expected brothers. If ever there were an object

object of compassion, it is now before us. I observe his young heart flutter with joy, when, after all his wanderings and anxieties, he descries his brothers, and their tents, and their flocks afar off. I see the tear of tenderness rush to his eyes, while he delivers his father's greeting, and tells the tale of his youthful sorrows and mistakes upon the road. I see his blooming countenance flushed with delight and satisfaction, at the thought of being again among friends, of having once more a protector. Ah cruel, cruel disappointment! They have been plotting his ruin, they have devoted him to death. He comes to them with words of peace, with kind and affectionate inquiries after their health and prosperity. They meet him with looks of aversion, with words of contempt and hatred, with thoughts of blood.

The history of Jacob's family exhibits a shocking view of manners and of society at that period. They digest and execute a plan of murder, with as much coolness as we would an improvement in agriculture, or an adventure in trade. It is no wonder the poor Shechemites found no pity at their hands, when they are so lost to the feelings of nature, humanity and filial duty, as to deliberate and determine, without ceremony or remorse, upon their own brother's death. The trifling incident of the dreams lies rankling in their bosoms. "Behold," say they, "this *dreamer* cometh." Well has our blessed Lord cautioned his disciples against the use of contemptuous expressions one to another. For however slight and insignificant a hard or ridiculous name at first sight may appear, it proceeds from an unkind heart, and partakes of the nature of murder.

It is no uncommon thing for men who have quite got over every scruple of conscience, and all sense of duty, still to retain some regard to decency; and to respect opinion and appearances after the heart is become perfectly callous. Though they can remorselessly resolve on shedding blood, they have not confi-

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dence enough to avow their violence and barbarity, but craft and falsehood must be called in, to cover their villany from the eye of the world. "Come now therefore, and let us slay him; and cast him into some pit, and we will say, some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams."* That there should have been one of the ten capable of conceiving and suggesting such a deed of horror, had been wonderful; but that only one of ten should rise up to intercede for the unhappy victim, exceeds all belief. We almost lose the remembrance of Rueben's filthiness, in his good-natured attempt to save his brother. If there were something of deceit in the proposal which he made to the rest for this purpose, it was on the side of virtue, and calls at least for pardon, if not for commendation.

Joseph was now at hand. And O how different his reception from what he fondly expected! "They stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him. And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it."† With truth has the wise man said, "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." The demons of envy and revenge have taken possession of their hearts. In vain he weeps, in vain he prays, in vain employs the tender names of father and brother, to win their pity. The coat, the odious coat, the badge of a partial father's fondness, steels their breasts. They strip it off with more of savage joy than ever the doating parent felt of satisfaction in seeing him put it on, or the hapless youth himself in wearing it. The horror of being cast alive into a pit to perish with hunger, is not to be conceived, much less expressed. What must it then have been to a heart like Joseph's, tremblingly alive to the keenest sensations of pain; acquainted, till then, only with gentleness and indulgence, and now dreadfully awakened

* Gen. xxxvii. 20. † Gen. xxxvii. 23, 24.

ened to perceive the full extent of his misery? Instant death had been mercy to one in such a situation.

As if they had done nothing, they sit down unconcernedly to eat bread. Savage monsters! Could the moderate cravings of their own appetite fail to remind them of the wretched state of their poor brother; fail to suggest the misery of perishing for want, and to awaken compassion in some gentle bosom? Yes; with his piercing shrieks yet sounding in their ears, with his piteous supplicating looks yet before their eyes, they indulge the commonest, lowest cravings of their own nature, and calmly consign him to a lingering death; the bitterness of which was every instant increased by the slowness of its approach. And now, behold the darling of Jacob on the very brink of despair; when Providence, wiser than they were cunning, and more powerful than they were wicked, interposes for his deliverance.

It was so ordered of Heaven, that a travelling company or caravan of Ishmaelitish merchants passed by, while they were at dinner, in the course of their traffic to Egypt. A thought occurred to Judah, whose heart now began somewhat to relent, that an opportunity offered of ridding themselves of their hated rival, without incurring the guilt of shedding his blood; namely, that of selling him for a slave to the Ishmaelites; who he knew would carry him along with them into Egypt, sell him over again for profit, and thereby forever prevent the possibility of his return, to detect their villany, and renew his pretensions to superiority over them.

No sooner was this proposal made than it was assented to. And they, who a little while before made nothing of taking away their brother's life, with less scruple and ceremony still, take upon them to rob him of his liberty; and, as if he had been a bullock, or a kid from the flock, sell him for twenty pieces of silver, into the hands of strangers. O the wonder-working hand of God! The circumstances which lately

lately seemed to poor Joseph so untoward and unfavourable, were working together for the preservation of his life, and paving the way to glory. Had he not wandered in the field, his arrival had happened too early for the passing by of these merchants to save him. Had he found his brethren in Shechem, as he expected, instead of Dothan, he had been out of the tract which his deliverers took. "Who can tell what is good or evil for a man," till the end come, and the mystery of providence be unfolded? These, to the eye of man, are little accidental circumstances. But they are a part of a vast arrangement, made by Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," to bring about a great purpose. There are wheels almost imperceptible in the great machine, which the untutored eye is apt wholly to overlook; but which are indeed as necessary to motion as the largest and most obvious.

Thus was the jewel of his father's heart vilely bartered away as a thing of little value. Behold Joseph in the hands of the descendants of him whose "hands were against every man, and every man's hands against him," and he is safer with wild Ishmaelites, than with bloody unnatural brothers. From avarice, if not from pity or affection, they will treat him kindly, that they may dispose of him to advantage. So much better is a merciful, or even a mercenary stranger, than an envious and cruel brother. Reuben, it appears, was not present at this consultation, bargain and delivery. He probably stole away, when the rest sat down to meat, that by a round-about path he might arrive at the pit where Joseph was hid, and assist him in effecting his escape, while the rest were otherwise employed. But he had made so large a circuit in order to avoid suspicion, that the sale was transacted before he came to the place, and his benevolent intention was thereby frustrated. He is the only one of the brothers who seems to have felt a single spark of pity for the unfortunate youth,

youth, or of concern for the distress of his aged parent. What then must his anguish have been, when he came to the pit, and found no Joseph there? From his worst fears however he is soon relieved, and, bad as it was, rejoices to hear that Joseph was only sold for a slave.

By common consent it is agreed to conceal, if possible, the whole of this dark scene. They must meet their father again, and to him something must be said for the non-appearance of his amiable, his beloved son. I am not more shocked at their first purpose of blood, than at their artful device to cover it, and their awful steadiness and fidelity to each other, in guarding so well the dreadful secret. It proves what deep, what determined, what thorough-paced villains they were. And from such men does the Jewish nation glory to have sprung! They stain the variegated coat, the cause of so much jealousy, with blood, which they intend shall pass with the wretched father for the blood of him that wore it; and they send it to Hebron as accidentally found in the field in that state, to carry its own doleful tidings with it.

I cannot accompany this fatal pledge to the place of its destination. Who can bear to witness the anguish of a miserable old man, sinking under the weight of accumulated woe? All his former griefs admitted of consolation. They were more directly from the hand of God, they were in the course of nature, they might be cured or endured. But this stab was mortal; it defied medicine, it mocked at length of time. He himself has had the principal hand in this great evil; and I fear, I fear he suspects the truth, though he says it not. Beautiful, too much beloved, ill-starred Rachel! once I pitied, now I congratulate thee. A gracious Providence has in kindness taken thee away from the evil to come. The sight of Joseph's vesture dipped in blood, must have

proved fatal to thee, hadst thou lived to that day. To have lived till now, must have been to endure pangs more frightful than the agonizing throes of child-birth, or the last dying struggles of dissolving nature. We hasten from a scene which the heart is unable long to contemplate, to land Joseph safely in Egypt,—where being arrived, he is transferred, like a bundle of spicery, from the Midianites to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, and captain of the guard.

And here your time warns me to stop. And here, in the hands of that God who "delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear," we deposit this precious trust, confident of its being restored, like all that we commit to God, increased in value, importance and utility. If the subject be pleasing to you, as it is to me, I shall hope to have the pleasure of resuming it with you next Lord's day.

Jesus, the well-beloved Son of God, came from his Father's house above, to bring to us, his brethren after the flesh, the gentle and affectionate commendations of his Father's love. Instead of welcome, he met with reproach and scorn. "He came to his own and his own received him not." "He was despised and rejected of men." "His familiar friend in whom he trusted, which did eat of his bread, lifted up his heel against him." Judas, one of his own house, sold him for thirty pieces of silver. He was stripped of his vesture, his raiment was stained with blood. "He looked and there was none to help." "He trode the wine press alone." "He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."† Men "thought evil against him,

* Isaiah liii. 7. † Heb. ii. 10.

him, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."* "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."† To the attentive reader of the scriptures, these, and many such applications as these, of the history of Joseph, to the person, the character, the office and undertaking of the Messiah, will readily occur. To the careless and unbelieving, more has been said than they will understand, regard, or approve. We commend them to the mercy of God, and we implore a blessing on what has been spoken, for Christ's sake. Amen.

* Gen. l. 20. † Psalm xxxiii. 11.

History of Joseph.

LECTURE XII.

GENESIS XXXIX. 2—6.

And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man, and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass, from the time that he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake: and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat: and Joseph was a goodly person, and well-favoured.

UNLESS "the heart be established by grace," in prosperity it will be elated above measure, and in adversity will be ready to sink under the weight of its woe. A principle of religion preserves the balance of the soul, and guards it equally from rising into insolence, or falling into dejection. It has been disputed whether prosperity or adversity be the severer trial of the two. In order to determine the question, it is necessary to know the character of the party who is tried. In some persons we meet with a stupidity, an insensibility of nature, on which change of circumstances

stances makes no apparent impression. This endeavours to pass upon itself, and actually does pass upon superficial observers, for moderation in success, and patience in affliction. But the rock is not patient, because without murmuring it bears the incessant dashing of the raging sea; neither does the snail deserve the praise of humility, because it attempts not to fly. That moderation is estimable, which, awake to all the advantages of rank, and fortune, and success, offends not God by levity and ingratitude, nor man by haughtiness and pride. That patience merits admiration and praise, which feels, yet complains not; which sighs, yet submits.

It is very natural for men to flatter themselves that they could support prosperity with wisdom and propriety. But I believe experience will evince, that while success tends to relax, weaken and extinguish the religious principle, calamity, by teaching us our own weakness and dependence, awakens, strengthens and keeps it alive. The lot of most men alternately furnishes occasion for exercise in both ways. It is the office of genuine and solid piety, to instruct us "in whatever state we are, therewith to be content;" "to exercise men unto godliness, which is profitable unto all things, having the promise both of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."

The amiable and illustrious person on whose history we entered in the last Lecture, and which we are now to continue, affords a shining and affecting example of a mind unsubdued by the deepest distress, and uncorrupted by the highest degree of elevation. His affliction commenced at an early period of life. It was, of its kind, peculiarly bitter and severe. It came from a quarter whence it was least to be apprehended; and the transition was instantaneous, from a tranquillity and indulgence which knew no bound, to anguish which no language can express, no imagination conceive. As he was to be an eminent type of Him, who, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, not opening

opening her mouth," scripture represents Joseph submitting to the barbarous treatment of his brothers, as doomed to perish of hunger in an empty pit, and sold into slavery to the Ishmaelites, without arguing, without upbraiding, without repining.

Were it possible to form a stronger idea of the hardheartedness of Jacob's sons than that which their cruelty to Joseph affords, it is to see them the calm witnesses of the anguish of their father's soul, without being moved by all his misery and tears to divulge the important secret, and to pour into the fond paternal heart the cordial balm, which even the knowledge of his son's being a slave in Egypt would have administered. As a dawn of hope would thence have arisen, that by some blessed revolution of events, the precious hour might perhaps at length arrive, which should restore him to his father again. What a dreadful thing it is to embark on a sea of vice! To return is difficult, if not impossible—To proceed is ruin.

Joseph meanwhile lives and prospers in a strange land. He has not lost all, he has lost nothing, who enjoys the divine presence and favour. The amiable youth is indeed from under the shadow of his father's wing, but the protection of Heaven is not withdrawn; "the Almighty is his refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." A young man brought up like him, in fullness, liberty, indulgence and ease, might have been supposed sullen and stubborn under a change of condition so sudden and so severe; or to have sunk into melancholy and despair. But with Joseph it was not so. With true magnanimity and spirit, he cheerfully accommodates his mind to his situation, and without murmur or reluctance, addresses himself to the discharge of his duty as a diligent and faithful servant. We have not power over our lot, to carve it out as we please; but the mind has power over itself; and happiness has its seat in the mind, not in external circumstances. The favourite

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son of Israel seems degraded and dishonoured, even when raised to the first rank of servitude in Potiphar's house; but Joseph, pious, modest, wise and faithful, is equally respectable whether as a son or as a servant.

Never did Potiphar make so fortunate a purchase. The blessing of God enters into his house, from the moment Joseph becomes a member of the family. In many various ways are sevants curses or comforts to those with whom they dwell. Let a servant have a conscience, and you have a certain pledge of his fidelity. Divest him of that, and where is your security, that either your property or your person is safe in his hands? Joseph demeaned himself as a good servant; Potiphar as a wise and a kind master. In vain do we look for affection and attachment in our inferiors, if we treat them with insolence, unkindness or neglect. The great and affluent are much more in the power of, much more dependent upon their meanest domestics, than they are willing to understand, or to acknowledge. And surely, it is much more prudent to secure their affection, as humble friends, by condescension and good-nature, than to provoke their resentment or revenge, by pride and severity.

Joseph has been faithful over a few things, he is made ruler over many things. "He made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." His personal accomplishments keep pace with his mental endowments, "he was a goodly person, and well-favoured." Beauty like every other gift of nature, is good of itself, and therefore to be received with thankfulness. But alas, how often does it prove a snare to the possessor, and a temptation to others! This quality of Joseph's had like to have proved more fatal to him than even the envy of his brothers. This last threatened only his body, but that endangers the soul. The one sold him into bondage, the other would have plunged him into dishonour. His master's wife looked upon him with eyes of unhallowed affection,

affection, and attempts to make him a partaker of her impurity. To expatiate on the nature of this temptation, would be as indecent as it is unnecessary. It is a fearful example of the dreadful length which the human mind is capable of going, when the restraints of shame are once broken through.

Some kinds of temptation are boldly to be encountered, and resolutely overcome. There are others only to be conquered by flight, and disarmed by removing to a distance. Joseph dwells only on one circumstance, in order to settle and determine his conduct—the all-seeing eye of God, and the danger of offending him; "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God."* Pleasure, and interest, and passion, blind the eyes; but conscience, with scrupulous attention, always and every where reveres an omnipresent Jehovah. The lower principles of our nature respect and are regulated by consequences. This great principle is moved only by a sense of right and wrong. Interest and desire are contented with inquiring, "is there no danger of being found out?" But conscience is only to be satisfied, by ascertaining, "whether it be sin or duty."

The consequence to Joseph, was such as might be expected from the temper of a shameless woman, false, lascivious and resentful. The demon of lust turned into those of rage and revenge, she accuses of an attempt to seduce her, the man, whom no consideration of pleasure, or of advantage, could for a moment seduce from the right path. This accusation, however false, being uncontradicted, is admitted as true; and Joseph, as the reward of faithfulness almost without example, is immured in close custody, to be dragged forth at a proper opportunity to severer punishment. And here again we have a fresh instance of the greatness of his mind. He chooses rather to incur his master's groundless displeasure, and to sink under the weight of a false accusation, than to vindicate his own

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

own honour, by exposing the shame of a bad woman; and he leaves the clearing up of his character, and the preservation of his life, to that God with whom he had entrusted still higher concerns, those of his immortal soul. And thus, the least-assuming, the shame-faced, feminine virtues, temperance, and chastity, and innocence, and self-government, are found in company with the most manly, the heroic qualities, intrepidity, constancy and contempt of death.

No place is frightful to a good man but the dungeon of an ill conscience. Free from that, Joseph is at large, though in prison. It is the favour or displeasure of God that makes this or the other spot comfortable or irksome. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" but to the guilty, the whole world is a place of confinement. God, who delivered him out of the pit, accompanies him also to the prison. And what heart so savage that goodness cannot mollify, what nature so obdurate that the power of the Almighty cannot reach? The profession of a gaoler is unfriendly to benevolence; it is a character which implies sternness and severity. But whether this man were formed of gentler clay, or whether the meekness and modesty of Joseph had wrought even upon a rocky heart; or whether Providence specially interposed to further its own deep designs, so it is, we find our good young man in high favour with his keeper. Whereever we find Joseph,—in Potiphar's house, in prison, or at court, we find a man faithful, and diligent, and trusty; and we find a man honoured, esteemed and confided in, by all with whom he has any connexion. Let a man be inflexibly honest and true, and he will never have reason to accuse the world of want of confidence. But it is no wonder if the dishonest knave find men full of doubt and suspicion. As his master's house before, so the prison now, prospers on Joseph's account. The world is not always sensible of its obligation to the presence of good men. But Sodom was in a fearful state the moment righteous Lot went out

of

of it; and when the people of God, "the salt of the earth," are all removed from it, the end of the world cannot be at a great distance.

By a strange concurrence of circumstances, which the Divine Providence alone could have brought together, Joseph has for his fellow prisoners two of the chief officers of the king of Egypt, who had fallen under their master's displeasure; and had been for some time in confinement, uncertain of their doom. The great God is whetting his instruments, making his arrangements, marshalling his forces, at very different times, and in very different places. The envy of Jacob's sons, the lasciviousness of Potiphar's wife, the disobedience of Pharaoh's servants, the anger of the king himself,—all, all meet, strange to think! in one point, the elevation of Joseph to the right hand of the throne. Remove but one link, and the chain is broken asunder. Take away but a single stone, and the fabric falls to the ground. But "this work and counsel is of God, and therefore it cannot be overthrown." "He willeth, and none can let it."

It is not at all surprising, that he who had been preparing his work in places and in minds so remote from, so unlike to, and so unconnected with each other, should bring it to a conclusion by means somewhat uncommon and supernatural. It happened, that in one and the same night, the chief butler and the chief baker of Pharaoh dreamed each a dream, which laid fast hold of their minds and memory. And being men, like the rest of their country, strongly tinctured with superstition, and at that time in circumstances which peculiarly disposed them to receive superstitious impressions, their spirits are considerably affected by the vision of the night; not doubting, that it portended the speedy approach of some great good or evil. Joseph attending them in the morning, in the course of his duty, observed the deep concern which was engraved on their countenances; and sympathy being always one of the native effusions

of

of an honeſt heart, he kindly inquires into the cauſe of it.

By the way, how pleaſant is it to obſerve this excellent young perſon, with ſo much cheerfulneſs and good nature performing the humble offices of a gaoler's ſervant? He was accuſtomed to be waited upon, to be miniſtered unto; but duty calls, and with alacrity he miniſters to the neceſſity of others. But what do I ſee? An under gaoler ſtarting up all at once into an interpreter of dreams, poſſeſſing a ſagacity that reaches into futurity, directed and taught by a Spirit whoſe piercing eye penetrates into eternity, and diſcerns all the wonders of the world unknown! How much wiſer, how much more noble, how much more excellent, are they who live in communion with God than other men! For though they do not all attain the gift of prophecy, the gift of working miracles, the gift of ſpeaking with tongues; yet they all are dignified by the ſpirit of prayer, the ſpirit of adoption, "the ſpirit of faith, the ſpirit of love, and of a ſound mind."

Joſeph, from the different complexion of their ſeveral dreams, and inſpired no doubt by wiſdom from above, predicts their approaching doom; the ſpeedy reſtoration of the one to his former truſt and dignity; a ſudden and ignominious death to the other. Nothing but inſpiration could have borne Joſeph through a declaration ſo bold and deciſive, and which was to be brought to the awful teſt of confirmation or diſappointment in ſo ſhort a ſpace as three days. So confident is he of the certainty of his interpretation, that he founds all his hopes of enlargement upon it. And there is ſomething inexpreſſibly tender and pathetic in his application to the chief butler to that effect, "but think on me when it ſhall be well with thee, and ſhew kindneſs, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this houſe. For indeed I was ſtolen away out of the

the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing, that they should put me into the dungeon."*

The event justified the prediction; and it is an awful and affecting illustration of the observation of the wise man, "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."† A youth, a stranger, a prisoner, could have no power over the counsels of Pharaoh. But the power which controls all the potentates of the earth, and marshals the whole host of heaven, is bringing his own word to pass, and performing his own pleasure. The chief butler, we may suppose, readily promised Joseph his best services when he should be again restored to place and power; but, like a true courtier, he thinks no more of his promise, nor of his fellow prisoner, after his own turn was served. So selfish, so thoughtless, so ungrateful is man! Had he been under no personal obligation to the young stranger, for his tender assiduities while in confinement, and for the agreeable and certain intelligence which he received from him of his approaching deliverance, common humanity, awakened by the simple tale of innocence and misery which he had told, ought to have prompted his immediate and most earnest exertions in his behalf. And yet he suffers two full years to linger away, without caring to reflect whether such a person existed or not. And when he thinks of him at last, it is not the generous recollection of kindness and attachment; but the selfish remembrance of courtly adulation, eager to gratify his prince, not to rescue talents, and innocence and worth, from unmerited oppression. Pharaoh hanged him not for the offences which he had committed against his sovereign, but for his forgetfulness and ingratitude to Joseph, let him be hung up an object of detestation and contempt to all generations of mankind.

How

* Gen. xl. 14, 15. † Prov. xxi. 1.

How very differently do God and men often judge of one and the same object! If there be in all Egypt a person more forlorn and inconsiderable than another, it is an Hebrew slave in a dungeon. But "God raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes." Pharaoh himself now begins to act a part in this wonderful drama. For kings, in the hand of God, are only instruments of an higher order, and of more extensive operation. Kings are liable to hunger and thirst like other men; kings must sleep, and may be disturbed by dreams like other men—and thus it happened to the mighty sovereign of Egypt. With vision upon vision, in one night, was his rest troubled; the strange coincidence and mysterious import of which greatly perplex his waking thoughts. In a country teeming with gods, and over-run with superstition, no circumstance was overlooked which in any manner seemed to portend a future event. No wonder then that the prince, who has not always the best informed nor the firmest mind of any man within his dominions, should be rendered uneasy by a repetition of dreams, so singular in themselves, so similar to and yet so unlike one another. It is not less wonderful, that in a country so prolific of magicians and soothsayers, not one should be found bold enough to affix a meaning, or guess at an interpretation. Was it that the true God confounded and silenced their vain imaginations? or that Pharaoh, dissatisfied with their idle conjectures, and prompted from above to make farther inquiry, rejected the usual modes of solution, that, heaven-directed, Joseph might emerge out of obscurity to save a great nation, to preserve his father's house in famine, and to fulfil the prediction and promise made to Abraham, concerning the future fortunes of his posterity?

The king's vexation interests and affects the whole court. And then for the first time the chief butler bethinks

bethinks himself of his faults, and of his promise, and of his obligations to his fellow prisoner, and relates in the hearing of the king, the very extraordinary circumstances of his own imprisonment and enlargement; of his dream, the interpretation and the issue. He is of consequence led to mention the character and situation of the interpreter. This instantly effects for Joseph, what his friendship, had it been exerted, perhaps would not have produced—an immediate order to set the prisoner free, and to bring him without delay into the royal presence. When men can be subservient to the interest, the pleasure, or the ambition of princes, they are in the sure road to preferment; and a man is often more indebted for success to a fortunate incident than to a righteous cause. Joseph's affairs are now in a train such as his warmest friends could wish; and again we see another saying of the wise man verified; "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men."*

Pharaoh's expectations are not disappointed. He relates his dreams; and God, the author of the visions, and who had sent the interpreter and the explanation, by the mouth of Joseph unfolds its meaning and import. Pharaoh's dream had puzzled himself and all Egypt by its first aspect; but now that it is explained, how easy, how simple, how applicable, how natural every thing appears! The greatest discoveries, after they are made, appear so obvious and so plain, that every one is ready to wonder he did not hit upon it first; and this instead of diminishing, greatly enhances the merit of the first discoverer. Upon the manifestation of the import of Pharaoh's redoubled vision, it is found, that God, who had given formerly to two of the servants an intimation of their approaching fate, was now giving to the sovereign a premonition of the visitations of his providence, to this great, populous and wealthy empire. A previous notice

* Prov. xxii. 29.

notice of good renders it a double blessing; a warning of evil prepares us to meet it, and thereby diminishes its weight.

Joseph's interpretation carried conviction along with it; and Pharaoh immediately resolves to act upon it. There is a certain undescribable charm in true wisdom, in unaffected goodness, that forces approbation, and carries the heart captive at once. There is a native dignity in virtue, which, while it never assumes, nor pushes itself forward, is never timorous, embarrassed or aukward. Joseph possesses unaffected ease and composure in the presence of Pharaoh and all his court; and the court on this occasion, we have reason to think, was a very splendid, public and crouded one. So good a thing it is to have the heart established by the fear of God. It casts out every other fear. But the days of his depression are now ended, and every step he has trod through this valley of humiliation, is a progress made to the glory that follows. And here we break off, having conducted Joseph to the right hand of the throne; and beholding him ready to mount the second chariot, while admiring nations proclaim before him, "bow the knee."

The next Lecture will exhibit the son of Jacob in all the splendour of high life; armed with all the authority of a minister of state, possessing a plenitude of power over the whole kingdom of Egypt.

Turn for a moment from Joseph, and behold a greater than him. "The prince of this world came, and found nothing in him." Temptation addressed to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," had from his lips an instant repulse, "it is written, it is written." "In his humiliation his judgment was taken away;" he suffered as a malefactor, though "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips." He was condemned and put to death upon a false accusation. From the triumphant ignominy of the cross, he dispenses life and death to his fellow-sufferers; paradise to the one, everlasting shame to the other.

other. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him?" "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." "He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* "Fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"† "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."‡ "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."§

I conclude all in the words of the beloved disciple, who thus describes a more august vision than ever appeared to Pharaoh: "And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain: having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about

* Phil. ii. 7—11. † Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

‡ Rev. iii. 21. § Rev. ii. 10.

about the throne, and the beasts and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying, Blessing, honour, glory and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever." *

* Rev. v. 6—14.

History of Joseph.

LECTURE XIII.

GENESIS xli. 38—44.

And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck: and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had: and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh; and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

IF it be pleasant to observe, in particular instances, the providence of God justifying its own procedure, by relieving and vindicating oppressed innocence, or by precipitating prosperous guilt from its lofty seat; what must be the satisfaction and delight of beholding the whole plan of Providence unfolded, every mystery in the divine conduct explained, and all the ways of God to men completely vindicated! A very considerable part of our present distress arises from hastiness and impatience of spirit. We are for rushing

to

to the end at once; we will not afford our Maker and Ruler leisure to open his own designs, to illustrate his own meaning. We would have the work of Heaven performed in our way; we have settled the whole order of things in our own minds; and all is wrong that ignorance, fretfulness and presumption are pleased to dislike. Cloudy, rainy weather is much less agreeable than serenity; yet it requires but a moment's reflection to be convinced that eternal sunshine would be the reverse of a blessing to mankind. Now the alternate succession of day and night, of fair weather and rain, have not greater beauty and utility in the world of nature, than the successive shades of adversity, and sun-beams of prosperity, which appear on the face of the moral world.

Of this unceasing succession or mixture, the lot of individuals, the fortune of nations, the state of the globe, perhaps the system of the universe is composed. Nothing is permitted to continue too long: no being is suffered to go too far out of his station. The balance eternally depends from the hand of a Being possessed of infinite wisdom; and after a few slight vibrations, the scales speedily bring each other into equilibrium again. The swelling of a wave, the rolling of the ship, nay the finger of a child may for a moment derange the compass; but after trembling an instant or two from point to point, immediately the needle resumes its steady, stated northern direction.

If there be in history a passage, which more than another encourages us patiently and submissively to wait for the end, to follow and submit to the conduct of Providence, it is the story of Joseph the son of Jacob. What man of humanity would have refused to lend his helping hand to rescue the innocent youth from the fury of his unnatural brothers, to pull him up out of the pit, and to restore him to his father again? Who would not gladly have sacrificed a part of his substance to purchase his release from Egyptian

servitude? What friend to truth and virtue but would have rejoiced to vindicate his character from the vile aspersions of his infamous mistress, and to save him from undeserved punishment? What heart, alive to the feelings of gratitude, but would have seconded the application of "the chief butler," for his immediate enlargement? But all this would have been precipitate, rash and absurd. His fond father himself could not have conducted his favourite son to the honours which he attained, by a way so certain, so safe, and so honourable. Whether we regard Joseph himself, or the interests of his father's family, or the welfare of Egypt, or the good of the human race, Providence, when we come to the issue, it is found, has secured, promoted and succeeded them all, in its own wise and gracious method, infinitely better than they possibly could have been by all the sagacity and foresight of man.

By the wonderful steps then which we have seen, behold Joseph exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, made lord over all Egypt, the lives, the conduct, the liberties, the property of millions entrusted to his care, subjected to his authority. Behold him married to a princess, arrayed in vestures of fine linen, a gold chain about his neck, the royal signet in his hands, riding through the land in the second chariot, while admiring nations bow the knee before him. Behold the dream which boyish vanity, perhaps, at first suggested, which fraternal jealousy so keenly reprobated, and so sternly avenged, which a father's wisdom was constrained to check and reprove, and which incredulity, no doubt, would treat as the idle chimera of a disturbed imagination, is verified and brought to pass. When we observe so many of the important events of Joseph's life turning upon the hinge of dreams and their interpretation, we are taught to think respectfully of every method by which God is pleased to communicate the knowledge of his will to mankind. And, when our own dreams, as they sometimes do, either

either call us to duty, or convince us of sin; when they recal to our memory what is past, or admonish us of what is to come, so that we may profit thereby, we ought to consider them as warnings from Heaven, and the voice of God. But to attend to and seek a meaning in every wandering of a sleeping fancy is silly and childish; and to suffer them, of whatever complexion they be, to influence the conduct of life, so as to induce us to neglect our duty, to vex and disquiet ourselves, or disturb others, is absurd, superstitious and wicked.

There are three particulars in this part of the history of Joseph, which have exercised the learning and ingenuity of critics and commentators. First, whether the Hebrew word, *Abrech*, translated in our version, "bow the knee," had not better have been rendered, as the word will bear, "tender father;" an appellation descriptive of his office and character; dignity and gentleness united. Secondly, it is inquired, what is the exact import of the name which Pharaoh gave to Joseph upon his promotion? It was customary for eastern princes and nations to distinguish by new titles, persons who had rendered themselves illustrious by superior abilities, or splendid and important actions; as in the case of Daniel and the three other children of the captivity. That which was given to Joseph, according to some, is an Egyptian expression which signifies "Saviour of the world," and this, if just, conveys a high idea of the importance which the king ascribed to Joseph's information and advice. Others contend that it signifies no more than "revealer, or expounder of secrets." This last interpretation has the most numerous, perhaps the most respectable support. The third particular alluded to, involves in it something like a censure of Joseph, as if, hurried away by motives of ambition and pride, he had been eager to form an improper and dangerous matrimonial connexion with an idolatrous woman, nay the daughter of a man who by profession,

profession, as priest of *On*, or Heliopolis, the city of the Sun, was concerned to support and promote an idolatrous worship. The critics who advance and maintain this opinion, represent Joseph as a mere time-serving sycophant, imbibing in a moment the spirit and manners of a court, and sacrificing principle to conveniency. I confess myself so partial to this amiable and excellent man, that without hesitation I undertake to meet this charge; and would allege in his behalf, that, as the Spirit of God no where reprehends this conduct, which in cases deserving blame is done freely and without reserve, so we ought not, without just cause, and perfect knowledge, to find fault; charity obliging us "to think no evil," where we can think well; to put the best construction on what is doubtful, and to judge of what is not clear and explicit, by that which is. When I see Providence blessing this union by the birth of two sons, raised in process of time to a double rank of dignity and importance in Israel, it is impossible for me to think uncharitably of the union itself, which was the origin of that blessing. What, did Joseph acknowledge God so closely in every thing, even to the very naming of his children, correspondently to the aspects of the Divine Providence towards him, and can we suppose he neglected God in a matter of so much higher consequence? Let me rather say, and say it without reserve, that the piety, the chastity, the fidelity, the self-government of Joseph, in flying from an illicit commerce with his master's wife, was thus rewarded of Heaven by a virtuous and lasting union with a chaste virgin and a prince's daughter. But we dwell too long on a vindication, which was perhaps altogether unnecessary. To proceed:

Joseph has arrived at a station of very high honour, but it is not to him a post of emolument and ease merely; and I rejoice to see the same person who diligently and humanely served the goaler as a deputy, and who faithfully managed the affairs of Potiphar as a steward,

a steward, attentively, humbly, industriously conducting the interests of a great king, and a mighty empire, as a minister of state. On which I found an observation frequently made already, I care not how often, that the fear of God is the best security of a man's good behaviour in every situation; and that "he is to be trusted in nothing, who has not a conscience in every thing."

Joseph was but thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, seventeen of which he had passed under the wing of a fond indulgent parent, and the other thirteen, at that period of life when the heart is most devoted to pleasure, he had lingered away in all the variety of human wretchedness; but in all the dignity of virtue, all the superiority of wisdom, all the delights, pure and sublime, of true piety. And now, at an age when most men are only beginning to reflect and act as reasonable beings, we see him raised, not by accident, nor cabal, nor petulance, but by undisputed merit, to a situation, which one part of mankind looks up to with desire, another with awe, and a third with despair. And happy was it for Egypt, that ever this youth, this stranger, this Hebrew was sold for a slave into its bosom, for "God sent him to save much people alive."

Egypt gloried that she was not, like other countries, dependent on the clouds of Heaven for the fertility of her soil, and the exuberance of her crops, but, that she derived her rich harvests from the flux and reflux of her own river. But in vain had the Nile arisen to the desired height during seven successive years of uncommon plenteousness, had not the prophetic foresight of a Joseph taught both prince and people to take advantage of the favour of Providence, and to lay a good foundation for the time to come. Nothing do men so much abuse as plenty; nothing do they so soon and so severely feel as want of bread. These seven prosperous years seem to compensate to Joseph all his former ills. His honour is cleared, his

his predictions are accomplished. What seldom meets, the sovereign and the subject strive who shall exalt him most; his domestic felicity keeps pace with the public prosperity; conscience approves; and God, the great God, smiles. If there be a condition of humanity to be desired, to be envied, it was this.

Shall I stop to express a wonder, that during all this period, with all the power of Pharaoh in his hand, with a heart so tender, and a spirit so dutiful, he should make no attempt to convey to the wretched old man in Canaan, intelligence concerning his preservation and his present condition. But I check myself, when I consider that the whole was of the Lord of Hosts, "who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

It is worth while to observe, how the style of scripture is adapted to experience, and the nature of things. Years of tranquillity and success glide away imperceptibly; but every moment of pain is observed and felt, as it halts along. Accordingly, the history of seven prosperous and abundant years is dispatched in a sentence or two; whereas seven years of famine, as they were more sensibly felt in their progress, so they afford more abundant materials to the pen of the historian; and the detail is lengthened out to the reader, as the distress was to the unhappy sufferers. Little do we think of this in the days of health, and ease and joy; and therefore little thankful are we to God for our multiplied comforts. To instruct us in their value, he is constrained to put forth his hand, and either to withdraw or to mar them; and we awaken, alas too late, to a sense of our obligations to an indulgent Providence! The seven years of famine are now commenced, and the honour of Joseph's sagacity is established, but by a very different proof. When either the promises or the threatenings of the word are fulfilled, we have equally a demonstration of the truth and faithfulness of God: venerable

erable when he blesses, and venerable when he punishes a guilty world. Happy the prince, who, circumstanced like Pharaoh, can roll the cares and anxieties of government upon a minister of ability and integrity like Joseph. Happy the people, governed by a ruler, who, himself educated in the school of affliction, has learned to succour the distressed.

The beginning and progress of scarcity is described in this part of the sacred history with wonderful exactness and energy. It represents men first parting cheerfully with their money for food. By and by they are reduced to part with their lands, their hope and security, for years to come, in exchange for the subsistence of a day. And, at length, reluctantly and slow, we behold them surrendering liberty itself for the support of life.

The neighbouring nations feel, with Egypt, the rod of God's anger; but every neighbouring nation is not blessed with a Joseph, capable of foreseeing the evil, and of applying the remedy. Canaan, in common with others, is visited with the general calamity; and Jacob, who lived there, Jacob, the heir of the promise, is ready to perish with his family for lack of food. But he ill understands the promises, and the power of God, who, under the pressure of any affliction, trusts to a miracle for relief, when honest and lawful means are in his power.

After an interval of more than thirteen years, we revisit poor Jacob's melancholy habitation, and find him what he was from the beginning, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Behold a wound which time could not cure, festering in his bosom. Behold him sinking into the grave under a load which reason could not alleviate, nor religion itself totally remove. His family indeed, greatly increased by a multiplicity of grandchildren; but that great blessing embittered and converted into a curse, by the dreadful pressure of famine. What a dismal condition! Children crying for bread, and none to give them; the wretched

wretched parents looking at their perishing offspring, and then at one another in silent astonishment and despair. Conscience, which had probably slept quietly in better days, would now, no doubt, awaken the bitter memory of guilt long past, and which they had endeavoured to forget. The sight of their own children ready to die of hunger, could not but revive the dreadful recollection of the time, when, in cold blood, they resolved to starve a brother, an innocent brother, to death.

In Jacob himself, we behold a moving and instructive picture of every child of God, and of that church whereof he was then the living head and representative, "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." He "heard there was corn in Egypt." He had silver and gold in abundance. Despondency was only adding to the evil; he therefore rouses his astonished sons from their lethargy and dejection, and proposes a journey into Egypt to buy food. There is no necessity so cogent as that of eating. It eagerly catches therefore at every prospect of relief, believes things incredible, attempts things impossible. The ten elder sons of Jacob therefore, set out for the land of Egypt on this errand, and into Egypt they came.

On making the necessary inquiries respecting the purchase of corn, they are directed, as all buyers, both natives and foreigners were, to Joseph; without whom "no man lifted up his hand or his foot in all the land." The change produced in a youth of seventeen, by the addition of thirteen years; his new name, his dress, language and manners; his high station and his stately demeanor, have effectually disguised their brother from their knowledge; and Providence determined to bate them not a single iota of the humiliation predicted by the dreams, prostrates their "ten sheaves before the sheaf of Joseph," levels the ten proud spirits at their unknown brother's feet.

feet. Want makes men wonderfully submissive and complying: and they who fight against God will sooner or later find themselves dreadfully over-matched. Unknown by them, they stand well known and confessed to him. At sight of them natural affection resumes its empire in his heart, and the tide which had long forgotten to flow, now rushes impetuously from its source. He beholds ten; but where are the two, more beloved and endeared than all the rest? It is impossible to conceive, much more to describe, the emotions of Joseph's soul on hearing tidings of his father's family: to learn that his dear, his tender parent was still in the land of the living; surviving so long misery so dreadful; that this dear brother, his own mother's son, was alive with him also, and in health. The sovereignty of Egypt I am persuaded never yielded him satisfaction half so sincere.

The singularity of his situation evidently suggested to Joseph the experiment which he now resolved to make of the temper and character of his brothers; and particularly of their disposition in an hour of trial, toward their father and Benjamin. I cannot suppose him for a moment actuated by sentiments of revenge. Had he been under the influence of such a passion, the means of gratification were certainly most amply in his power. But the whole tenor of his conduct shews that he was governed by a very different spirit; his severity is altogether affected, the better to carry on the design which he had formed; and the peculiarity of his behaviour toward some of the brothers, is to be ascribed to some peculiar circumstances in the history of the family, which the sacred penman has not thought proper to record. Some rigid critics, however, while they acquit Joseph of cruelty and revenge, severely accuse him of impiety and profanity in swearing, and swearing repeatedly, "by the life of Pharaoh," and that, to a charge which he well knew not to be founded in fact. It is not our design to undertake a justification of Joseph in every

every particular. What character can stand throughout the test of a rigid examination? Sacred history exhibits men just as they are, not what they ought in all respects to be. Dark spots are most easily discerned in the whitest garments, and foul blemishes in the fairest reputations. But let no sanctity of character presume to shelter the slightest deviation from the path of God's commandment. No; the smallest sin, if any sin be small, is a degradation and disgrace to the most sanctified and exalted character.

While Joseph, the better to conceal himself, talks and acts like a true Egyptian, God employs his affected sternness and severity to awaken the slumbering consciences of his brothers, and to shew the sons of Jacob to themselves. Treated as spies, roughly spoken to, their most solemn protestations disregarded, put in prison and bound—their treatment of Joseph in the evil day which put him in their power, rushes upon their memory, in all its guilt and horror, and they mutually upbraid and reproach each other with their barbarity, "saying one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold also, his blood is required."*

This mutual and self-accusation excites in the tender heart of Joseph, emotions which he is unable to conceal. Hearing himself mentioned with so much tenderness and regret, by persons once so cruel, and in a language which he had been long unaccustomed to hear, the pretended Egyptian becomes in spite of himself a real Israelite; his bosom swells, his visage warms, the tear starts to his eye. To prevent a premature discovery, he is constrained to retire and recompose himself. He returns and renews the conversation, and

* Gen. xlii. 21, 22.

and again assuming the Lord of Egypt, sets nine at liberty, binds Simeon before their eyes, and commits him to close confinement, as a hostage for their return, together with Benjamin their brother. He then dismisses them loaded with corn for their families, and provision for the way: having secretly given orders to his steward, in making up the bags of corn, to deposit each man's money in the mouth of his respective sack. This was not discovered till they were considerably advanced on their journey homeward; when one undoing his sack to give his ass provender, observed his money in his sack's mouth. Upon their arrival in Canaan, the same thing is found to have happened to them all. Comparing this singularly strange circumstance with the rest of their eventful journey to Egypt, they discern the hand of God in it, and observing such an unaccountable mixture of flattering and of mortifying events, they remain, upon the whole, perplexed and confounded. When the mind is sore, and the conscience seriously alarmed, dispensations of every complexion, both mercy and judgment, are viewed with a fearful eye. When we know we are deserving of punishment, every thing becomes a punishment to us, either felt or feared.

And now again, the unhappy father reckoning his long expected sons, as they arrive, finds their number short by one. "Simeon too is not;" and the account given of his absence, instead of pouring balm into the wound, is "as vinegar upon nitre." "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not," and Benjamin is demanded. To recover what he has lost, he must risk still more. Simeon is not what he should be, but his kind forgiving father cannot think of giving him up, worthless as he is. To lose a pious, promising child by death, is painful: but the death of a thoughtless, graceless profligate, to a parent of piety and sensibility, is much worse. We see the distressed old man putting

ting off, and still putting off the evil day. He has more than one reason for sparing the corn which had been brought from such a distance, and procured at such a risk. Before a fresh supply can be obtained, and Simeon restored, "the son of his right hand" must be surrendered, Benjamin must be taken away; and the thought of this plants a dagger in his heart. But the famine continues, necessity presses, and a second pilgrimage must be undertaken. The account of it, however, must for the present be deferred. The history swells upon us, and we shall rather entreat your patient attention to another Lecture on the subject, than hasten over a story so much calculated at once to please and to instruct. But behold a greater than Joseph is here.

Behold Jesus, "for the suffering of death," "highly exalted," distinguished by "a name that is above every name," "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."* "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."† "The Father himself judgeth no man: but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."‡ "I am the bread of life that came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."§ "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger: and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh

* Phil. ii. 10, 11. † Matt. xxviii. 18. ‡ John v. 22, 23.
§ John vi. 50, 51.

cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."* "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."† "It hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell:"‡ "and of his fulness have all ye received, and grace for grace." "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."§ "Your fathers found corn in Egypt." "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead, but he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up the last day."‖ "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."¶ "Blessed are they that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."** "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."†† "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they, and the children of Judah together, going, and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."‡‡ "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me: that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of

* John vi. 35, 37. † Isa. lv. 1. ‡ Col. i. 19. § John vi. 55.
‖ John vi. 54. ¶ Isa. xlv. 22. ** Matth. viii. 11.
†† John xiv. 2, 3. ‡‡ Jer. l. 4, 5.

of Israel."* "Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved." "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace: In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."†

* Luke xxii. 28—30. † John xvi. 33.

History

History of Joseph.

LECTURE XIV.

GENESIS xlv. 3, 4, 5.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him: for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph saith unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you: and they came near; and he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me hither before you to preserve life.

THE productions of human power and skill afford but an imperfect and short-lived pleasure. The delight of the artist himself is over long before his work is completed, and the wonder of the spectator lasts only till he is let into the secret, and admitted behind the scenes. It is not so with the works of God. When the mighty fabric of the universe was finished, God surveyed his work with perfect complacency and satisfaction, for "behold it was all very good." And such, to this day, it appears in the eye of every beholder. No frequency of contemplation, no closeness of inspection, no keenness of investigation, or success in discovery, ever bring on weariness or disgust. The eye is eternally delighted with the magnificence and splendour of the azure vault, with the verdure and variety of the fertile earth. The music of the grove never fails to charm the listening ear; the perfume breathed from "the flower and the shrub, and the

tree," never palls upon the sense. The whole order, harmony, majesty and beauty of nature, forever astonish, compose, elevate, inform and instruct the soul.

The same may, with truth, be said of the word of God. What human composition so exquisite as always to please? What human composition have we patience to turn over a tenth or a twentieth time? The stores of human wisdom are quickly exhausted; the eye speedily reaches forward to the end of created perfection. But though the charm of novelty may have passed away, though memory may have stored itself with the very words, and the heart have felt the impression a thousand and a thousand times, yet the beauty, the force, the excellency, the importance of scripture composition remain in undiminished lustre. That sun in the firmament of grace, which has irradiated, cheered and blessed ages and generations past, is also our light and our glory, and shall, with unimpaired strength, with unconfined liberality, diffuse light, and life, and joy to the final consummation of all things.

If serious minds be disposed to think thus of scripture in general, all persons of sensibility and taste will, I am persuaded, agree in forming such a judgment of the history of Joseph in particular. The unlettered man and the scholar; the child and the grown man; the ingenious and the simple; the believer and the infidel; Greek and Jew, have in all ages admired, delighted in, and edified by a story, which, clothed with all the graces of eloquence, exhibits the most uncommon, surprising, affecting and important events; and conveys the purest and sublimest lessons of piety and morality.

The famine continued to rage with unrelenting severity in Egypt and the countries adjacent, and dire indeed must have been the pressure of that calamity, which compelled a father, tender and affectionate like Jacob, after losing two sons by a stroke heavier than that of death, to part with his youngest, darling hope, at the risk of never seeing him more. How horrid that

that plague which can force a fond mother to devour her own child for food! Let this awful reflection, in a year of scarcity, and at a season of waste and luxury,* check profusion, awaken our compassion to the poor and wretched, and temper our joy. The old man yields up his Benjamin, as if his own body were dismembering limb by limb. "If it must be so now" "take your brother, and arise, go again unto the man. And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."†

With double money in their hands, then, with a present consisting of the choicest productions of Canaan, for the governor of Egypt, and with the heart and soul of their aged father in their custody, they set out on a second pilgrimage to buy food. What is a land producing "balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds," compared to a land of corn! What worthless things are gold and silver compared to bread. If our own country be less fertile in the wine and oil, the drugs and perfumes, the gems and gold of other regions, it is more abundantly productive of the staff and the protection of life,—the "finest of the wheat," the oak more firm and durable than cedar, and iron more precious than rubies.

Their arrival being announced to Joseph, and his brother Benjamin appearing with the rest; Benjamin, whom having parted with a child, he could not have known, but from the company in which he was found, he gives orders to make preparation for a great entertainment in honour of these strangers. The men were not more distressed at the harshness of the treatment which they met with at first, than they are perplexed and confounded at the excessive kindness and hospitality of their present reception; for an ill conscience is ever timid and suspicious. Against the time of Joseph's arrival they make ready their present, and

* December 25th, 1782. † Gen. xliii. 13, 14.

being admitted into his presence, they again prostrate themselves to the earth before him. In vain do men set themselves to counteract the decrees of Heaven.

After the customary salutations, with a mixture of anxiety and hope, he inquires after the life and welfare of their father, and, to his inexpressible satisfaction, learns that he was alive and in health. But the sight of Benjamin awakens too many tender recollections to be resisted, too many fond ideas to be suppressed. The premature loss of their common parent, the partial affection of their kind father, the present anxiety and distress of the venerable man, his own strange eventful history, Benjamin's tender youth, his distance from home, his separation from paternal care and protection, his exposedness to dangers which had almost proved fatal to himself; all, all rush upon his mind at once, and excite emotions too powerful to be concealed. He is obliged to retire in order to throw a veil over those feelings which must have betrayed him; and gives vent to his heart in secret. Having recomposed himself, he returns to the company, and, resuming the Egyptian, commands the entertainment to be served up. Three tables are set out, one for himself apart, as governor of the country; another for his guests, by themselves; and a third for the Egyptians of his household, or such as might be invited on the occasion. For the Egyptians, either from religious scruples, or political pride and aversion, abhorred a communication with other nations in convivial or sacred entertainments.

And here was presented a fresh source of wonder to the sons of Jacob. By Joseph's direction they are arranged at table in the exact order of their birth, without inquiry or information. This, in connexion with the account which it behoved them to have heard concerning such an extraordinary person, must have conveyed to them an idea of a sagacity altogether preternatural. Nor would their surprise be diminished by the distinguished mark of respect shewn

to

to their youngeſt brother; for the meſs ſent from the governor's table to him, was "five times" the quantity of any of the reſt; and it was thus that in ancient times, among eaſtern nations, ſuperior deference and eſteem were expreſſed. However, the increaſing feſtivity of the banquet gradually diſſipated all their terrors. "They drank and were merry." The Hebrew word unqueſtionably inſinuates that they drank to exceſs. It is natural for men to ruſh from one extreme to another, and it is not improbable that Joſeph threw this temptation in their way, in order to obtain a more thorough inſight into their temper and character, by obſerving them attentively, in a ſituation when the heart overflows, and the tongue conceals and diſguiſes nothing. Whatever be in this, he is preparing a trial for them more ſevere than any which they had as yet experienced, and which in ſome meaſure compenſated the anguiſh they had occaſioned to their father, when they impreſſed him with the belief of his ſon's death.

Loaded with civilities, provided with a ſupply of corn for their ſtarving families, Simeon reſtored, Benjamin not detained; they ſet out on their journey to Canaan, with a merry heart, talking one to another of the ſtrange things which had come to paſs. But ſcarcely are they got clear of the city when they are purſued and overtaken by Joſeph's ſteward, charging them with theft, and commanding them inſtantly to return to his maſter to anſwer for it.

With terror and aſtoniſhment, though in the confidence of innocence, they deny the charge, and reaſon upon the improbability of it. Search is made among their ſtuff for the goods alleged to be ſtolen; ten are acquitted with honour, and they are juſt beginning to exult in the detected falſehood of ſuch a ſcandalous imputation, when, to their utter confuſion, Joſeph's cup was found in Benjamin's ſack. Overwhelmed with ſhame and terror, they are again conducted to his preſence. The crime is proved. To

deny

deny it were vain, to excuse it nugatory and absurd; and to account for it it is impossible.

Judah, who had been the most urgent with his father to send Benjamin, and had solemnly pledged himself for his safe return, feels himself now called forth: and, in a strain of the most pathetic eloquence that ever flowed from an aching heart, attempts not to extenuate or exculpate, but to raise compassion, and to obtain mercy. The piece is of exquisite beauty and elegance, and, being in every one's hands, may be re-perused at your leisure. The Jewish writers take delight in dwelling upon, and expanding it. Philo in particular, in his treatise entitled, "Joseph," has given a paraphrase of this speech of Judah, which possesses wonderful elegance and propriety of expression, and force of thought. Some of you, perhaps, may not be displeased with having an opportunity of comparing the diffusive, laboured eloquence of the paraphrast, with the energetic simplicity of the sacred text. The former puts into Judah's mouth the following address.

"When we appeared, Sir, before you the first time, we answered without reserve, and according to the strictest truth, all the questions which you were pleased to put to us concerning our family. We acquainted you, that we had a father heavily laden with years, but still more heavily with misfortunes; a father, whose whole life had been one continued struggle with adversity. We added that we had a brother peculiarly dear to him, as the children born towards the end of their life, generally are to old men, and who is the only one remaining of his mother; his brother having come in early youth to a most tragical end. You commanded us, as the proof of our veracity and innocence, to bring that brother unto you, and your command was delivered with such threatenings, that the terror of them accompanied us all the way back to our country, and embittered the remainder of our journey. We reported

reported every thing minutely to our father, as you directed us. Resolutely and long, he refused to entrust us with the care of that child. Love suggested a thousand causes of apprehension upon his account. He loaded us with the bitterest reproaches for having declared that we had another brother. Subdued by the famine, he at length reluctantly consented; and putting his beloved son, this unhappy youth, into our hands, conjured us by every dear, every awful name, to guard with tenderness his precious life, and as we would not see him expire before our eyes in anguish and despair, to bring him back in safety. He parted with him as with a limb torn from his own body; and in an agony of grief inexpressible, deplored the dreadful necessity which separated him from a son, on whom all the happiness of his life depended. How then can we appear before a father of such delicate sensibility? With what eyes shall we dare to look upon him, unless we carry back with us this son of his right hand, this staff of his old age, whom alas you have condemned to slavery? The good old man will expire in horrors dreadful to nature, as soon as he shall find that his son is not with us. Our enemies will insult over us under these misfortunes, and treat us as the most infamous of parricides. I must appear to the world, and to myself, as the perpetrator of that most horrid of crimes, the murder of a father; for it was I who most urgently pressed my father to yield. I engaged by the most solemn promises, and the most sacred pledges, to bring the child back. Me he entrusted with the sacred deposit, and of my hand he will require it. Have pity, I beseech you, on the deplorable condition of an old man, stripped of his last comfort, and whose misery will be aggravated by reflecting that he foresaw its approach and yet wanted resolution to prevent it. If your just indignation must needs have a sacrifice, here I am ready, at the price of my liberty, or of my life, to expiate this

young

young man's guilt, and to purchase his release? Grant this request, not so much for the sake of the youth himself, as of his absent father, who never offended you, but who venerates your person and esteems your virtues. Suffer us not to plead in vain for a shelter under your right hand, to which we flee, as to an holy altar, consecrated as a refuge to the miserable. Pity an old man, who, during the whole course of a long life, has cultivated arts becoming a man of wisdom and probity, and who, on account of his amiable qualities, is almost adored by the inhabitants of Syria and Canaan, though he profess a religion, and follow a mode of living totally different from theirs."

This address, it must be acknowledged, possesses uncommon grace and tenderness. But it is evident from whence the modern, pretended Jew, has copied his tenderest and most delicate touches. And when the copy and the original are brought close together, it will be apparent to a discerning eye which is the most finished piece. If Philo has made Judah speak well, it will hardly be disputed that Moses has made him speak better.

The words of Judah penetrated the heart of Joseph. The affectionate manner in which his father was mentioned, the unfeigned earnestness expressed to save him from the impending blow; the generosity of his offer to put himself in Benjamin's place, to purchase a parent's comfort and a brother's release, at the price of his own liberty; all this satisfies him, that time, and affliction, and a sense of duty, and the powerful constraint of returning nature, had introduced another and a happier spirit into the family. He finds himself incapable of any longer deferring the pleasure which he should both receive and communicate by making a discovery of himself. The curiosity of his domestics must have been greatly raised by the unaccountable peculiarity of his behaviour to these strangers, but he does not choose to have any spectators of that

that scene of nature which he was meditating, except those who were to be actors in it. The heart likes not to have its stronger emotions seen of many witnesses. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy." He therefore commands every Egyptian out of the apartment, and being left alone with his eleven brothers, whose consternation must have been greatly increased by the orders which they had now heard given, he bursts into an agony of tenderness, and in words inarticulate and indistinct through tears, declares in one breath who he was; and in the next, with accents that pierce the soul, pours out his heart in a tender inquiry after his old kind father. Two short words unfold the whole mystery of this strange conduct.

But what language can convey an adequate idea of Joseph's feelings at that moment; the feelings of a heart glowing at the thought of once more beholding his venerable sire, of being pressed to his bosom, of cheering and cherishing his declining years; a heart melting into sympathy, forgiveness and brotherly love, exulting in the joy of rendering good for evil; a heart lost in wonder and overflowing with gratitude, while it contemplated the wisdom and goodness of all-ruling Providence, in producing such events by means so incomprehensible.

The feelings of the brothers too, are rather to be conceived than described. Thunderstruck with astonishment, oppressed with shame, stung with remorse, petrified with terror:—no, not terror; the words, the looks, the tears of their relenting brother, assure them in a moment that they have nothing to fear. But, unable to make any reply, they afford the noble-minded, the condescending Joseph, an opportunity of so far recovering himself, as to be able to administer this strongest of all consolation, that their unkindness to himself had been intended, ordered and over-ruled of God, to answer the most valuable and important purposes to him, to themselves, to their father's house, and

and to many nations. "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you, to preserve life."* In this address of Joseph, I know not which to admire most; his magnanimity in pardoning offences so atrocious, losing sight of the criminals in the brothers; his wonderful skill in adapting the style of his consolatory arguments so exactly to the circumstances of the case; his invincible humility in carrying the spirit and temper of the lowliest condition and relations of humanity, into the loftiest, most envied, and most corruptive station of courtly grandeur; or his pure, fervent and sublime piety, in considering and acknowledging all that had come to pass, as the design and operation of Heaven.

With infinite judgment and propriety, the sacred historian has put no reply whatever, into the mouths of the brothers. There are certain situations which defy description; certain emotions which silence best, which silence only, can explain. And such was theirs. Joseph however is not so lost in joy, as to forget that it was far from being perfect till one more became a partaker of it, nor so much swallowed up in the present, as to neglect the future. With gladness of heart would he have flown to Hebron, and been himself the messenger of his own life and prosperity, to the good old man. But the duties of his station forbid. This is one of the taxes which greatness is doomed to pay. It must learn to repress the inclinations and forego the pleasures of the private citizen. Princes live not to themselves but to the public; and the happiness of millions, is a felicity infinitely superior to every sordid, every selfish gratification. He could not, must not go to his father; but it was not impossible to remove his father into Egypt. The excellence of his disposition appears in every thing. In characters like his, we do not find duty justling duty out of doors, but every one in its proper place. Passion

* Gen. xlv. 5.

sion tempered by prudence; and wisdom animated by passion. To render the projected removal of his venerable parent as easy and comfortable as possible to his advanced age, and increasing infirmities, he proposes for his residence the land of Goshen, which was a province of the lower Egypt, on the east side of the Nile, bordering upon Arabia, and a frontier to Palestine. This province was fit for feeding cattle, the profession which his father and brethren followed; and it was not far from the city where the Egyptian monarchs usually resided, and where Joseph's stated habitation of course was. It is called *Zoan* in the seventy-eighth psalm, and Tanais by profane authors. This nearness of situation, Joseph alleged as one motive to induce his father to undertake the journey; and there he engaged to maintain him and all his family, in affluence and comfort.

In Pharaoh we have an amiable instance of qualities rarely to be found in the character of princes—attachment and gratitude. He cheerfully confirms all the engagements of his minister, though they extended to the disposing of a whole province of his empire. He outruns the wishes and desires of even filial duty and affection, and strives to repay the kindness of Joseph, whom God had made a father to him, by becoming a shield and protector to his father's house.

But what shall we say, what shall we think of Joseph himself? Men suddenly and remarkably elevated, are apt to forget themselves, to forget those from whom they sprung, and the means by which they rose. But behold the prime minister of a mighty empire, the favourite of a great and powerful prince, the lord of Egypt, attending to the conveniency and comfort of an old shepherd, whose person was unknown in the country which he governed, his religion abhorred, and his occupation despised. O nature, nature! How honourable is thy empire, how glorious are thy triumphs!—Joseph is now as eager to hasten the departure of his brethren, as he was before artful to detain

tain them. And at Pharaoh's command, dismisses them with a retinue suitable to the rank and dignity of the man who was next the throne. But it is with pleasure we observe, that the splendour of this retinue was not the silly ostentation of wealth and power, but the display of much better passions, the kindness, the liberality, the gratitude of a good and honest heart.

And, is the sun indeed at length going to arise upon Jacob's hoary head? And shall the heart so long dead to joy, yet once more awaken to transport? And shall his eyes at last close in peace? Alas, alas! are we not all dying to the world, before we begin to live to comfort? Is not the drama of life over, before we are well sensible that our part in the scene has commenced? Is it not rather too late in life to purchase a blessing so transitory, by a change so great? What will a man not do to save his family from perishing, and to be joined to such a son as Joseph? It is indeed late in life, before we die to hope; and wisely and well it is ordered, that we should hope to the end. The man who has suffered so much, who has died so often, has not much more either to feel or to fear.

This dawning of happiness upon the head of the aged patriarch, is to himself so new, so unlike the common complexion of his lot, opens so many interesting views of Providence—that I trust you will deem with me the prosperous period of Jacob's history deserving of a Lecture by itself. Here then we break off, after having suggested to your minds a few texts of scripture, tending to illustrate and to apply our subject.

—And—"there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare,

ſpare, and I periſh with hunger! I will ariſe, and go to my father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt Heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon: make me as one of thy hired ſervants. And he aroſe, and came to his father: but when he was yet a great way off, his father ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kiſſed him."*—"Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls."†—"Leave thy fatherleſs children, I will preſerve them alive: and let thy widows truſt in me."‡—"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleaſure to give you the kingdom."§—"O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the prophets, and ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."‖—"For of a truth againſt thy holy child Jeſus, whom thou haſt anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Iſrael, were gathered together: for to do whatſoever thy hand and thy counſel determined before to be done."¶—"Becauſe the fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men: and the weakneſs of God is ſtronger than men."**—"This cometh forth from the Lord of Hoſts, which is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working."††—"Truſt in the Lord, and do good, ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed. Delight thyſelf alſo in the Lord, and he ſhall give thee the deſires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, truſt alſo in him, and

* Luke xv. 14—20. † Matt. xi. 28, 29. ‡ Jer. xlix. 11.
§ Luke xii. 32. ‖ Matt. xxiii. 37. ¶ Acts iv. 27, 28.
** 1 Cor. i. 25. †† Iſai. xxviii. 29.

and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way."* —"Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee."†—"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."‡

* Psalm xxxvii. 3, 4, 5, 6, 23. † Job xxii. 21.
‡ Prov. iii. 6.

History

History of Jacob and Joseph.

LECTURE XV.

GENESIS xlv. 24—28.

So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way. And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father; and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.

IF there be such a thing as pure and perfect joy upon earth, it is that which fills the heart of a parent, when he hears of the wisdom, the virtue and the prosperity of a darling child. If there be sorrow that admits not of consolation, it is the sorrow of a father, for the vice or folly of an ungracious, thankless son, and for the misery in which he has plunged himself. The patriarch Jacob felt both these in the extreme. He had now lived to the age of one hundred and thirty years; and had proved all the bitter variety of human wretchedness. Every change of condition he has hitherto undergone, is only the sad transition from affliction to affliction. The burthen at length becomes too heavy to bear, and we see a

—miserable

miserable old man sinking into the grave under the accumulated weight of woes insupportable. In parting with Benjamin he had yielded up his last stake, and renounced all hopes of happiness in this world; calmly looking forward to that peaceful region, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest."

But the full estimate of human life cannot be made till the scene be closed. The shades of night at last begin to disperse, and the day dawns. While he is tormenting himself in Canaan, with the apprehension of never seeing more his last, his only remaining hope, Providence is maturing in Egypt a gracious design in his behalf, which is in a moment to turn his sorrow into joy.

Joseph having discovered himself to his brethren, hastens their return homeward, and dismisses them provided with every accommodation for the safe and comfortable removal of their aged father, and their tender children. What a triumph was Joseph's! What a glorious superiority! The triumph of Heaven, the superiority of God himself, who "overcomes evil with good." But he is unable to conceal the partiality of his affection to Benjamin. As he distinguished him at table by a five-fold portion, he distinguishes him at parting with a more splendid and costly present than the rest, consisting of three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. In a wardrobe of great value and variety, a considerable part of ancient magnificence consisted. This we learn both from scripture, and from profane authors. Sampson proposed as a reward to him who should expound his riddle, "thirty changes of garments." Naaman the Syrian, among other valuable commodities, carried "ten changes of garments," as a gratification to the prophet from whom he expected the cure of his leprosy. Under the first Roman emperors, this vanity and extravagance were carried to such an excessive pitch, that the Prætor Lucullus, according to Plutarch,

tarch, his biographer, had two hundred changes of apparel; and Horace insinuates, in one of his epistles, that by some, the luxury was carried to the enormous extravagance of five thousand suits. And it is, without doubt, to this ostentatious profusion the apostle James alludes, when he thus censures the abuse of wealth, "Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries; your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten."

But was it wisely done, sage governor of Egypt? was it wisely done, thus to scatter the seeds of jealousy and envy in hearts so susceptible of these dreadful passions? Have you forgot the coat of many colours, the dangerous badge of your father's fondness to yourself? Have you not rendered your own advice necessary, "See that you fall not out by the way?" Happily, the recollection of past disasters, and the kind behaviour and gentle admonition of their affectionate brother, have subdued their boisterous spirits, and attuned their hearts to love. The anxiety of the old man for their return is better to be conceived than described. How often in a day would his fond eyes turn to the way by which Benjamin was expected back? How would the tardy hours linger, as the heart languished with hope deferred? At last the blessed moment arrives, the train appears; the number complete, Benjamin safe, Simeon restored. But what can this mean? Instead of eleven men driving their asses laden with corn, a splendid retinue, the glory of Egypt, the waggons of Pharaoh! The heart that has been long inured to affliction, interprets every appearance against itself. Some things are too good, others too evil to be hastily credited. The utmost height of Jacob's expectation was to behold his youngest son again, with a supply of corn for his starving family. But to hear that his long-lost, his much lamented Joseph was still living, that he was the ruler of all Egypt, the saviour of a great nation, the father of a mighty prince, O! it is, it is too much. Nature

tottering under a load of woe, now sinks and faints under an excess of joy. Such tidings are too flattering to be believed.

Did the brothers now disclose the whole of the mighty secret, and take shame to themselves for their vile conduct to so excellent a father, to so amiable a brother? Or, trusting to Joseph's generosity, did they conceal the part which they had acted in this strange mysterious drama? Probably the latter is the truth. The soul shrinks back from the discovery of its own wickedness. To confess, and condemn themselves, could do now no good, and must greatly have marred and diminished their aged parent's satisfaction, if indeed he had no suspicion how the case stood. The good man has been so long a stranger to felicity, that the possibility of it is called in question; that slowly and cautiously he yields to the sweet demonstration. Convinced, satisfied at length, what joy is equal to the joy of Jacob? Is it not worth wading through a sea of trouble, to come to such a shore at length? The blessings of Providence are well worth waiting for. They may seem to linger; they are not always such as we wished and expected: but they are ever seasonable, ever suitable, and they compensate in a moment the pain and misery of a whole life.

But is it not late in life to undertake such a journey? No; it is to see Joseph, to be joined unto him; to be an eye-witness of his grandeur, and a partaker of his liberality. How often has Egypt sheltered and nourished the church of God! Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, Moses, Jesus Christ himself, there successively found protection. The same place, according as Providence ordains it, is either a trying furnace, or a refuge and sanctuary. A king that knows Joseph is a nursing father to Israel; another arises who knows him not, and he wastes and destroys. But our patriarch was not merely following the impulse of natural affection, though that had been warrant sufficient for even a still greater removal; he is also obeying the

dictates

dictates of wisdom, in making a prudent provision for his numerous and increasing family, and he is listening to a special call and encouragement from Heaven. Before he leaves Canaan, probably forever, he visits Beersheba, the chosen and favourite residence of his father; and there he renews his covenant with God by sacrifice. Those enterprises are most likely to succeed, those comforts to afford most genuine satisfaction, in which God is seen, acknowledged and enjoyed. The sacrifices of the devout by day, are answered by the visions of the Almighty in the night season. A man can proceed with cheerfulness and confidence, when he has got his Maker's permission.

The vision assures him that he should arrive in safety, should prosper in Egypt, should embrace his son, and that "Joseph should put his hand upon his eyes," that is, perform the last offices of filial duty and humanity. We meet with the same expression and idea in many passages of the heathen poets. Penelope, in Homer, prays that Telemachus her son may close her eyes, and those of his father Ulysses. The mother of Euryalus in the Æneid, among many other bitter expressions of sorrow over her dead son, laments that she was denied the wretched consolation, since he must die before her, of pressing down his dying eyes. Human nature thus strives to outlive itself, and the heart, while it is yet capable of feeling, consoles itself with the hope of receiving marks of tenderness and attachment, after it can feel no more. The old man's heart is now at rest, he is acting obedience to the command of Heaven, he is complying with one of the worthiest propensities of nature. He is indebted for the commodiousness with which he travels, to the person whom on earth he most dearly loved, and to whom, of all others, he would most willingly be obliged.

How different the patriarch's situation, every different journey he undertakes? His first was to Padan-aram, when he fled from the face of an angry brother.

Then he was solitary and friendless, but free from care, free from sorrow. The second, flying from unkind relations back again to Canaan, rich in children, rich in cattle, but troubled in spirit, oppressed with anxiety. And now we see him the third time in motion towards Egypt, richer than ever, both in possessions and in prospects, but bending under the pressure of age, and its concomitant infirmities, worn out with calamity, and almost dead to joy.

The family of Jacob, including the addition of what Joseph had gotten in Egypt, now amounted to seventy souls. And the priest of On's daughter, whose alliance was doubtless intended as an honour to Joseph, is honoured and ennobled by being ranked in the family of Jacob, and by having become a mother in Israel.

Scripture describes in its own inimitable manner, the meeting between the father and son. "And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."* This is honest nature, this is the genuine language of the heart.

In Joseph we see filial piety and fraternal affection happily blended with wisdom, humility and discretion. His will was law in Egypt. To what honours, preferments and emoluments might not the brothers and nephews of the governor-general have aspired? But he consults their true happiness, by guarding them at once from the languor of idleness, and the madness of ambition. Shepherds they were bred, and shepherds let them continue. Violent transitions ill suit the staid and serious periods of human life.

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* Gen. xlvi. 28—30.

His behaviour as a subject of Pharaoh is equally amiable and praise-worthy. He never loses sight of the duties of his station, never becomes arrogant and assuming, in the confidence of royal favour. "Without him no man lifted up his hand or foot in all the land;" but without Pharaoh's consent he will not dispose of a single field to his nearest relations. He is too wise, and too good, to make the mad attempt of some upstart favourites, to overcome national prejudices by dint of power and authority. The Egyptians held the profession of a shepherd in contempt, and he is not silly enough to dream of *forcing* it into respect.

We have already taken occasion to praise the gratitude, generosity and attachment of this prince, and with pleasure we repeat it. We see him nobly striving to discharge some part of the mighty obligation which had been laid upon him and his whole kingdom, by the son of the patriarch, by shewing all possible kindness to his father's house. "And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee, in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell, in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any man of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."* The interview between the venerable man himself, and this good prince, is highly interesting and instructive. Old age and virtue are honoured with the kind regard and attention of a king. Royalty is instructed, admonished and blessed by the wisdom of the sage, by the miseries of the man, by the piety and prayers of the prophet. Who gains by this visit? Pharaoh to be sure. His kingdom is strengthened by the accession of seventy good subjects, with their skill, industry and wealth: and "the effectual fervent prayers" of holy Israel were surely, Pharaoh himself being judge, compensation sufficient for the poor subsistence which

* Gen. xlvii. 5, 6.

which a decayed, dying old man received from his bounty.

It is with a mixture of shame and sorrow, that we bring forward the next passage in the history of Joseph. It exhibits him indeed as a most exquisite politician, who thoroughly understood the interests and the passions of mankind; who knew perfectly well how to take advantage of the occasion; but, over-devoted to the prince who had advanced him, employing his exorbitant power, his superiour skill and address, in planning and perfecting a system of despotism, by which the whole property of Egypt, together with the persons and liberties of all that mighty empire, were transferred to the sovereign. We behold him most ungenerously seizing the opportunity, which the growing distress of a lengthened famine afforded him, to aggrandize one at the expense of millions. He first conveys all the money in the land into the royal treasury. The cattle speedily follow. The increasing miseries of another unfavourable season, determine the wretched proprietors to part with their lands for food, and even reduce them to the dreadful necessity of offering to sell themselves for slaves, that they might live by their master's bounty. It is true, the prime minister of Pharaoh did not push his advantage to the extremest length. But it must be acknowledged, he carried it much farther than became the friend of misery, and of mankind. With so good a man as this Pharaoh, perhaps absolute power might be lodged with some degree of safety; but who shall answer for other Pharaohs who may arise, with the awful ability of doing mischief; possessing authority unfettered by legal restraint; possessing power not prompted by goodness, not tempered by mercy, not deigning to stoop to the sacred rights of mankind? Do we not see, in the hardships which under the following reign the posterity of Israel endured from Egyptian despotism, the danger of extending regal authority beyond the limits of reason? And thus, in the justice of Providence,

idence, the family of Joseph first felt the rod of that tyranny, which, with his own hands, he had established and aggrandized. Absolute sway can never be deposited with safety in any hands, but in his, who is constantly employing his power for the salvation of men, not their destruction. But we turn from a scene, which it is impossible to contemplate without both regret and resentment; happy to reflect, that we live in a country, where law, not will, is the rule of government; where the strong voice of royal prerogative is drowned and lost, in the sterner, louder proclamation of, "Thus it is written." We hasten from the vast, depopulated regions of state politics, to the pleasanter, fairer fields of private life.

Jacob's last days are by far his best. Seventeen years of unruffled tranquillity he passed in Egypt, enjoying the most pure and complete of all human gratifications—that of witnessing the prosperity, and experiencing the attachment of a favourite and dutiful child. But how comes it to pass, that periods of happiness shrink into so little a measure in description, while scenes of woe lengthen themselves out both to the sufferer, and to the relator? We record our mercies on the sand of the sea shore, which the washing of every wave smooths again, and the perishing memorial is obliterated and lost. Calamity we engrave upon the rock, which preserves the inscription from age to age.

But the famine has long been over, and why has not the patriarch thought of returning again to the land of his fathers? Young men love to ramble from place to place; but old age is steady and stationary. Removal was attended with increasing difficulty every day, from the increase of his age and infirmities, and from the number of his family. Besides, Joseph's presence was become necessary to the government of Egypt: and to part with him again, had been much worse than death. In a word, the whole was of the Lord, who was now laying the foundation of a fabric of wonders which should astonish the next generation,

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and every future age of the world, by the report of them. One hundred and thirty years of woe, and seventeen of comfort and happiness, come both at length to a period. Let the wretched think of this, and bear their affliction with fortitude; let the prosperous consider it well, that they "be not high minded, but fear." How dreadful is that misery which issues in despair of change! How exquisite the happiness which fills every faculty of the soul, and whose measure is eternity! But though Jacob be satisfied to live and to die in Egypt, he feels and expresses the natural desire of all men, that his ashes should rest in death with the venerable dust of his forefathers. Perceiving therefore in himself the decay of nature, and the approach of dissolution, he sent for his beloved son, and bound him by a solemn oath to carry his dead body to the cave of Machpelah; that he too, in death, might become an additional pledge to his family, that God would in due time make good to them that possession of Canaan which he had promised.

Having obtained this security, his heart is at rest; and for himself he has no further worldly concern. But the symptoms of approaching dissolution are now upon him, sickness, weakness, and loss of sight. All the authority and wealth of Egypt cannot repel these irresistible invaders. Old age is a disease which death only can cure. But, even in old age and death, Jacob's early affections are his constant and remaining ones, Rachel and Joseph, and *his* two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. So long as the vital fluid visits his heart, the memory of his beloved Rachel vibrates upon it. The last beams of his expiring eyes seek for her image and representative, her son and grandchildren; and even Benjamin seems, for a while, forgotten. Soon that wounded heart shall beat no more, and those weary eyes shall close in everlasting peace.

The sickness of his father being reported to Joseph, he instantly quits every other employment, and, attended

tended by his two sons, hastens to visit him to receive his last dying commands, his dying paternal benediction, and to cherish and soothe his departing spirit with that cordial of cordials, filial tenderness and love. Though nature was come to its lowest ebb with our patriarch, grace was in full spring-tide. The eye of the body could not discern the nearest objects, could not even distinguish the sons of Joseph, but the eye of the spirit, the spirit of prophecy that was in him, penetrated through the shades of night, and contemplated with clearness and accuracy, ages the most remote; persons, situations and events the most distant.

In this last and tender interview with his beloved son, he declares his intention to raise the children who had been born to him in Egypt, to their hereditary rank and honour in Israel; and he bequeaths to Joseph a particular possession which he had acquired by conquest in Canaan: "Moreover I have given to you one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite, with my sword, and with my bow:"* deeming him entitled, and not without much appearance of reason, to the double portion of the first born. For *his* mother alone was the wife of Jacob's choice. And had the course of reason and justice taken place, he should have had no children but by her. The posterity of Rachel, then, had an undoubted claim of preference, considering that in strict equity the whole would have belonged to them. At the same time he predicted the future fortunes of his grandchildren by Joseph; and, Heaven-instructed, foretells, that the younger should in time obtain the pre-eminence in rank, populousness and importance over the elder.

And now nothing remained but to declare and publish his last will, or rather the will of God respecting his posterity, for many generations to come. But this would require a much larger space than is now left

* Gen. xlviii. 22.

left for it. And we cannot conclude our discourse without having brought Jacob and Joseph somewhat nearer to the times which they foresaw and foretold; and to the glorious and exalted person, from resemblance to whom they derive all their dignity and consequence.

Joseph sold into Egypt, degraded into the condition of a servant, exalted from the dungeon to the right hand of the throne, invested with power, drawing his perishing kindred unto him, and bestowing upon them a possession "in the best of the land," still prefigures to us, Jesus "humbled and made of no reputation," "betrayed and sold into the hands of men," "lifted up," on the cross, and thence to a throne above the skies: "ascending on high, receiving gifts for men," attracting an elect world unto him, to give them "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

"Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him."*—"And it came to pass as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"†

"And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph: what he saith to you, do."‡ "The Father judgeth no man: but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."§ "God did send me before you," says Joseph to his brethren, "to preserve life." "I go," says Jesus to his disciples, "to prepare a place for you. And

* Luke xxiv. 16. † Luke xxiv. 30—32. ‡ Gen. xli. 55.
§ John v. 22, 23.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."* Joseph dispatches chariots and waggons to convey the feeble and infirm part of his father's family to the land of Goshen; and supplies them with all necessary and comfortable provision by the way. It being expedient for Christ to go out of the world, he promises, and he sends "the Comforter the Holy Ghost to shew his people things to come;" "to lead them into all truth," saying of him, "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you."† "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."‡ "He that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles: and some, prophets: and some, evangelists: and some, pastors, and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."§

Is your heart, O christian, like Jacob's, ready to faint, through unbelief, or through an excess of joy? Let your spirit with his revive, as you ponder "the exceeding great and precious promises" of the gospel in your soul, as you consult the sacred record, as your evidence brightens up, as the first fruits of the Spirit are given and tasted. From Canaan there is a going out, from Goshen a going out, as an entering in; but from the Canaan that is above, there is "no more going out:" "they are before the throne of God,

* John xiv. 2, 3. † John xvi. 14, 15.
‡ Psalm lxviii. 18. § Eph. iv. 10—13.

God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*—"He which testifieth these things, saith, Surely, I come quickly, Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."†

* Rev. vii. 15—17. † Rev. xxii. 20, 21.

History of Jacob and Joseph.

LECTURE XVI.

GENESIS xlix. 1, 33.

And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befal you in the last days. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

IT is the wise ordinance of nature, that men should wish and endeavour to live as long as they can. A life even of pain and misery extinguishes not the love of life. Nay, the mind, by a sort of pleasing delusion, creates to itself an imaginary immortality, and strives to extend its mortal interest and existence beyond the grave. Hence the anxiety of men, to provide for their families and friends that subsistence and comfort, which they are never to see them enjoy. Hence the trembling forebodings of paternal solicitude about his surviving offspring. Hence the hope that glistens in the dying eye, the blessing and the prayer that quaver on the faltering tongue, and the last gush of joy that visits the scarcely palpitating heart.

At every period of existence, we are thinking of some future period of existence; and we fondly carry the feelings of the present hour into the distant scenes of life; as if we could be susceptible of pleasure and pain after we have ceased from feeling.

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The child connects, in idea, the amusements of his inexperienced age with the attainments of maturer years; the dying father continues to live in his offspring; and, till we are indeed gone, we dream and dream of being longer here.

We have attended the progress of the patriarch Jacob through the various stages of a life unusually long, if we reckon woes for years, and compare it with the present standard of longevity; but short, if we consider the antediluvian scale; short, if we consider to what a span the history of it shrinks; short, if we compare it with eternity. The sun has shone upon his head at length, but not till it is covered with grey hairs. He has found his Joseph again, and even embraced *his* sons; but not till the hands are reduced to do the office of the eyes. He walks down the steep of life in tranquillity, but his limbs tremble under him. His favourite son is wise and good, exalted to deserved honours; but his advancement has its foundation in the unexampled villany of nine of his brothers. He is now arrived at that point to which the sorrows and joys of life equally tend, in which all events of whatever complexion must finally issue. Feeling in himself the approach of dissolution, and warned by that Spirit who had been his comforter in all his tribulations, he summons his children to his presence, and, with a mixture of paternal severity and tenderness, anxiety and confidence, administers his last dying counsels to them.

It belongs to another province than that of history, to illustrate and expound this address of the expiring patriarch to his sons. Indeed, it is a passage of perhaps as much difficulty as any in scripture. The imperfect knowledge we have of the sacred language, the abundant use made of metaphorical and figurative expression, allusion to historical facts, which are either not recorded at all, or rather hinted than related, together with the natural ambiguity and obscurity of prophecy, all concur here to render Jacob's meaning

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in many places hard to be understood, if not totally inexplicable. Instead therefore of spending your time, and abusing your patience, by dry unprofitable criticism on points which we frankly acknowledge we do not comprehend, we shall endeavour to look through the passage just as it stands in the common translation, into the dying patriarch's heart, and observe how the affections of the man blend themselves with the sagacity and penetration of the prophet.

Following the order of nature, he addresses himself first to Reuben, and fondly recollects the first emotions which filled his heart on becoming a father. He speaks to him as raised up and destined of Providence to birthright honours and privileges, but as having degraded and dishonoured himself by a base unnatural crime, and therefore rejected of God. And thereby men are instructed, that no superiority of birth, of fortune, of abilities, can counterbalance the weight of atrocious wickedness. In this censure, the shame, sorrow, resentment and regret of a dying father seem to mingle their force.

The two next sons of Jacob had associated together for the perpetration of an unheard-of piece of cruelty, impiety and deceit. Jacob had sharply reproved them at the time it was committed, and now gives his dying testimony against their barbarous and perfidious conduct, in terms of just indignation and abhorrence, and prophetically threatens them with division and dispersion. But this, which was, and intended to be a severe punishment to themselves, turned out in the accomplishment of the prediction, as the punishments of Heaven often are, an unspeakable honour and benefit to their posterity. Levi in particular, "divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel," was thereby rendered only more illustrious and important, being dignified as the priests and ministers of the most high God, in the presence of all their brethren. The crime of Reuben affected his descendants to the latest posterity. For they never regained their original

nal advantage of birth; never furnished judge or general, priest, prophet or prince to Israel; but the offence of Levi was expiated in his own person, and reached not in its effects to his offspring. The moral consequences of guilt ought in justice to extend to the guilty themselves alone; but the civil effects may and often do involve the innocent; and that without any imputation of justice. The son ought not to suffer death for the murder which his father has committed; but he may forfeit forever his hereditary honours by his father's treason.

By what apparent title was Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, raised to supremacy over his brethren? Neither his moral character, nor intellectual abilities, neither natural pre-eminence nor parental partiality seem to confer upon him this high distinction. It must therefore simply be resolved into the will of Him who "doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"* It was of Providence, who raiseth up one, and bringeth another down. But how came Jacob acquainted with this? The son on whom he conferred the double portion of primogeniture; the son whom he early dressed out in a coat of many colours; the son of his Rachel; the son of his old age; the son already so near a throne, and still nearer to his heart, would undoubtedly, could a father's fondness have disposed, succeeded to the royal dignity, or the sanctity of the priesthood, or the still higher dignity of giving birth to the promised Messiah, or to all the three. But the purposes of Heaven do not always keep pace with the destinations of men. They conform not themselves to the conclusions of human reason, or the propensities of the human heart. Not gentle and forgiving Joseph, but stern, unrelenting, mercileſs Levi gives birth to a race of priests. And lewd, incontinent, incestuous Judah, not chaste, modest, self-denied

* Dan. iv, 35.

ed Joseph, becomes the father of kings, and the progenitor of Shiloh. For what with men is all essential, all important, is with God only some little petty circumstance. And what human understanding treats as merely a casual, accidental circumstance, Providence exalts into the mighty hinge on which the fate of empires and of worlds depends. Men bend before a throne, and despise virtue; God pours respect upon goodness, and tramples upon a throne.

I must now express a wish, which I ought to have done earlier in my discourse, namely, that those who attend the Lecture of this evening, had with attention previously perused the whole of this forty-ninth chapter of Genesis. As without at least a general knowledge of it, much of what has been said, and still may be said, will possibly be unintelligible: and one great, perhaps the principal end of the Lecture, will be obtained, if any are thereby induced to search the scriptures more carefully, and to compare spiritual things with spiritual more diligently.

Jacob then, guided by the spirit of prophecy, as lately in preferring Ephraim to Manasseh, and not following his own spirit, which would gladly have given the preference to Joseph, as his father's partiality would have set Esau before himself, assigns the *kingdom* to his *fourth* son, with a profusion of images and emblems significant of power, authority and plenty. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies: thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion: who shall rouze him up."* "A lion's whelp, a lion, an old lion; garments washed in wine, and clothes in blood of grapes; eyes red with wine, teeth white with milk," is the strong figurative language employed by a prophetic father, to represent the invincible force, the secure dignity and majesty;

* Gen. xlix. 8, 9.

the rich abundance, allotted of God the disposer of all things, to this prerogative tribe.

But the prediction of importance above all the rest, is that which we have in the tenth verse, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Now, whatever difficulties may occur in the solution of particular words and phrases in this prophecy, it is certain the patriarch has his mind filled with an object peculiarly great; that he foresees regal and legislative power conferred on this branch of his family, for a long succession of ages, and until the arrival of a certain distinguished person or event, expressed by the term *Shiloh*, who should make a remarkable change in the state of Judah's family, and of the world in general. And of all the persons and events that have appeared from the death of Jacob to this hour, to none are the words, with any degree of propriety, applicable, but to Jacob's Son and Lord, in whom the royal line terminated; in whose trial and condemnation the posterity of Jacob solemnly renounced all regal and judicial authority, and voluntarily submitted to Cæsar as their sovereign; and to whom, Providence, by a chain of miracles at first, and an uninterrupted interposition, for almost one thousand eight hundred years, has drawn and united the nations of the earth, according to the letter of the prophecy, "to him shall the gathering of the people be." We pretend not to say, that the dying patriarch had a clear and distinct foreknowledge of the object; or that his words are a full historical description of the period to which they refer. It is sufficient for our purpose, if events which have certainly come to pass, are such as warrant a sober application of them to a prediction so singular, in circumstances so peculiar, and at a period so remote.

A very close investigation of the history, character, and local circumstances of the six tribes whose fathers

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are next named in order, would probably be found to justify what their prophetic parent here foretold concerning them. But, with him, we hasten them by, with him to come at a nobler, dearer object; where parental affection fixes with peculiar delight; which the understanding, the heart and the prophetic soul unite to establish, to exalt, to enlarge.

The only way to do justice to the prophet, to the prophecy, and to the Spirit which inspired the one to utter the other, is simply to read the words, and then to ponder them in our hearts. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob: from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty who shall bless thee, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breast, and of the womb. The blessings of thy father have prevailed, above the blessings of my progenitors: unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."* Is there an appearance of incoherence here, is there a redundancy of expression, is there a mixing of metaphor? It is but the more emphatically expressive of the meltings, the overflowings of an affectionate heart, collecting its last remains of vigour, retarding for a moment the stroke of death, returning yet once again but to return no more—to ancient feelings and propensities; expiring in the contemplation of the lasting felicity of a dearer self: the lover, the husband of Rachel, before his nerves are forever unstrung, his eyes forever closed, his tongue forever silent, dwelling on the name of her beloved offspring,

* Gen. xlix. 22—26.

turning the almoſt extinguiſhed orbs towards his amiable countenance, and ſtraining his darling Joſeph in his laſt embrace.

He has hardly ſtrength left to mention the name of Benjamin. But nature, while death leaves to Jacob any remainder of her empire, continues poſſeſſed of a ſound memory, a diſcerning judgment, and glowing affections. But ſhe can no more; the voice fails, the limbs contract, the breath departs, the artery beats no more; the heart of Jacob is at length at reſt.

The death of a parent is an event peculiarly affecting. The ſource of our own life ſeems thereby as it were dried up. While our parents live, we think we have a barrier betwixt us and the grave: but that being removed, the bold invader appears advancing upon us with haſtier ſtrides. If we look forward, behold no bulwark to defend us; if backward, our very children are warning us of the neceſſity of our departure; they preſs upon our heels, they are ready to lay their hands upon our eyes. Death ever ſo long expected, ever ſo viſibly approaching, nevertheleſs ſhocks and ſurpriſes when it comes at length.

Joſeph, having given way to a burſt of ſorrow over the lifeleſs clay of his honoured father, ſets about the ſpeedy execution of his ſolemn truſt, in diſcharge of the oath which he had taken. The higheſt reſpect we can pay the dead, is to fulfil their living deſires. He accordingly gives commandment to have the body embalmed according to the manner of the Egyptians. This practice, which had its origin in neceſſity, degenerated in proceſs of time into the groſſeſt oſtentation, and the moſt abſurd vanity. During the inundations of the Nile, it was neceſſary to employ art to preſerve dead bodies from putrefaction, till the waters ſubſided. But what was at firſt merely a temporary expedient againſt the inconveniency of heat, moiſture and corruption, at a ſeaſon when ſepulture was impoſſible, by degrees—refined, ſhall I ſay? in the hands of that

that ingenious people, into a work of infinite skill and expense. For so silly and vain-glorious is the human mind, that it strives for the gratification of pride, in objects the most humiliating and mortifying. We are far from charging Joseph with acting from a motive so wretched. The journey to Canaan was long; it was needful to use the common methods, to keep the corpse from becoming offensive; perhaps he deemed it decent and wise to conform, in a matter not directly sinful, to the practice, and to yield to the prejudices of the people among whom he dwelt. Whatever were his motives, certain it is, that in embalming persons of distinction, a considerable time was employed, and large sums expended. Threescore and ten days at least were necessary; forty in filling the body with aromatic drugs and spices, and thirty in hardening and drying it with salt and nitre. Some Jewish writers, fond of magnifying in every thing their extraction, give out, that Jacob, by express order of Pharaoh, was embalmed after the manner of the princes of Egypt, as a farther mark of gratitude and respect to Joseph; and that this explains the account we have in scripture, of the general mourning of the Egyptians for him, during the seventy days of the embalming.

At the end of that period, Joseph makes application to the king for liberty to go to Canaan, to bury his dead father. And here we have another not unamusing picture of the ancient manners of an Egyptian court. Joseph the saviour of Egypt, the second man in the kingdom, might not go into the royal presence in a mourning habit. At such pains has the world been, and such pains it still takes, to keep truth from the eyes and the ears of kings. Unhappy wretches! How can they be wise and good? Every creature with whom they are connected is in a conspiracy to keep them from the knowledge of themselves. The poor man called a monarch must not see a memorial of death, because death brings him to the level of other men. Pity it is, so well conditioned a prince

prince as Pharaoh should want any help to wisdom. Studious of the honour and comfort of so good and faithful a servant, he grants an immediate assent to his request, and permits him to employ the whole pomp of Egypt, if it might testify respect to the memory of the honest patriarch. Mark, my friends, how short the transition, how sudden the change. It is but a few short years since the waggons of Pharaoh were sent, with much form, to carry Jacob into Egypt; and now the same pomp is employed to convey his breathless clay back to Canaan again. Alas, alas! the ceremonies of a coronation, and of a funeral, differ only in a few trifling circumstances. Jacob is embalmed by the physicians; but behold he is preserved by a more precious perfume than all the spices of Egypt—the pious tears of a dutiful and affectionate child; and his memory preserved on this never-dying record, sends forth a fragrance which time cannot waste, nor use diminish.

The account is now at length closed, and the balance struck. And how does it stand? A life of one hundred and forty-seven years in all; of which not above a ninth part passed in any tolerable degree of peace and comfort, and that portion of it at a period when the heart has scarcely any taste of pleasure at all. The early, the susceptible part of his life was filled with a succession of distresses of the most disastrous and overwhelming nature; he was stricken, smitten there where the heart most sensibly feels. But let us turn the page, and examine the articles which make for him. An early declared, and continually supported favour and preference of Heaven in his behalf—Early, constant, habitual impressions of piety—The covenant promise and presence of the Almighty—The testimony of a conscience void of offence—The aggrandizement, and the virtues of his beloved son—Seventeen years of uninterrupted quiet, with daily growing prospects of prosperity to his family; and the consolation of expiring at last in the arms of Joseph—

seph—O, the balance is greatly in his favour! Who shall dare to say God has dealt hardly with him? We shall make Jacob himself judge of the case now, and defy him to say, "All these things are against me." The patriarch makes a greater figure in death than ever he had done in his life. The house of Israel, the seed of Abraham is now beginning to make a considerable appearance in the world. Egyptians forego their prejudices to do honour to the remains of the old shepherd of Beer-sheba; and the nations of Canaan are awakened to attention and respect, to a family which they hated or despised.

But, while the world is conferring empty, unavailing respect on the insensible dust, the immortal spirit has winged its flight to those bright regions, where the faithful repose in perfect and everlasting peace; where the smile of God obliterates all recollection of the favour of princes, and buries in eternal oblivion the pains and sorrows of a few transitory years. If saints in glory have any recollection of what passed upon earth, as undoubtedly they have, what satisfaction must it afford the glorified patriarch to call to remembrance the various stages of his pilgrimage state, the dark and dreary paths through which Providence led him, and which he once feared were leading him to destruction and death, now that he finds them all certainly and directly tending to his Father's house above? If saints in glory have any knowledge of what passes upon earth, as perhaps they may, what must it have been to Jacob, from the lofty height of a throne above the skies, to mark the order and course of Providence, in bringing to pass upon his family the things which were seen in prophetic vision, darkly, and at a distance, and spoken in much weakness and obscurity? What must it be to see the Gentile nations gathered together to Shiloh; to see the glory with the sceptre departed from Judah, but a crown, whose lustre shall never fade, put upon the head of Messiah the Prince? If saints

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in glory have any intercourse with their fellow-partakers in bliss, what must it have been to Jacob, after treading in the footsteps of Abraham and Isaac his fathers, to overtake and be joined to them in that world, where men are as the angels of God in heaven; and to see his faithful children, his Joseph in particular, gathered unto him, every one in his own order, their day of trial also over, and their warfare accomplished? What must it have been to all the ransomed of the Lord, to see their common Saviour returning on high, leading captivity captive, triumphing over principalities and powers? If there be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, what must have been the joy of that day, when an elect world, in the person of their divine Head, took possession of a throne eternal in the heavens?

The next Lecture will conclude the history of Joseph, and the book of Genesis, and bring down that of the world to its two thousand three hundred and ninth year, one thousand six hundred and ninety-five years before Christ.

—Jacob, like his forefathers, died, and was buried, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up died indeed, and was buried, but saw no corruption. Jacob could observe, be offended with, and reprove the faults of his children, but Christ has power to forgive sins, and to change a sinful nature. The day which Jacob saw afar off, is that which arose under Jesus in all its meridian splendour, and continues to shine unto this day. The body of Jacob, by the skill of physicians, was for a while saved from putrefaction; the body of Christ, by the almighty power of God, was preserved, so that not a bone of it was broken on the cross, not a particle of it lost and left in the grave. The corpse of the patriarch deposited in the cave of Machpelah, in Canaan, was a token and pledge to his family, that in due time they should return thither, and enjoy lasting possession; the resurrection and ascension of Christ's glorious body, gives full

full security to all his spiritual seed, that "those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him;" "Christ the head first, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming." The possession, of which Jacob's burial was the pledge, was itself partial and transitory, was long ago forfeited, and has long ago expired; but the succession ensured by the ascension of Christ, is "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Egyptian art might keep together the dust of Jacob for a while; but the power of God, through the grace that is in Christ, guards every fragment and shred of it even until now, and "will raise it up again at the last day." The afflicted man Jacob saw the end of all his troubles in the friendly tomb; Jacob, the believer, the saint in bliss, sees no end to his joy, but a still beginning, never-ending eternity. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." To me to live let it be Christ, and then to die it shall be gain. Let us be followers of them "who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." "Be faithful unto death, and ye shall receive a crown of life." "The hour cometh, when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall live." "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."*

* Rev. xx. 6.

History

History of Joseph.

LECTURE XVII.

GENESIS l. 24—26.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

THE events of a short and uncertain life upon earth, derive all their importance from the relation which they bear to a future and eternal state of existence. Remove the prospects of immortality, and what is left worthy the attention and pursuit of a man? What is reputation? A breath of empty air: honour, a bubble; riches, a bird eternally on the wing; youth, beauty, health, fading flowers of the spring; the splendour of kings, childish pageantry; a crown, a toy. That alone is valuable which time cannot impair, nor mortality destroy; that which, though the man die, continues to live and speak; that which, despised or neglected of men, is of high estimation in the sight of God. If in this life only there were hope, the happiest of mankind were a wretched, dark, comfortless being. But for the consolations of religion, Jacob must have sunk under the accumulated weight of calamity upon calamity: and Joseph destitute

tute of a principle of grace in the heart, had fallen in the hour of temptation, or despaired in the day of adversity; had risen into pride when exalted to honour, or deviated into resentment and revenge when armed with power. But, directed and supported by this celestial guide, he descends into the pit undejected, undismayed; spurns with holy indignation the solicitations of illicit desire; preserves moderation in the height of prosperity, and sinks the resentments of the injured man, in the meekness and gentleness of the affectionate brother. A character so near perfection seldom occurs; we have therefore been tempted to dwell upon it the longer, and now that we must part with it, we bid it farewel, with no little regret.

The last office in which we left Joseph employed, was the burial of his venerable parent. In this he at once acquitted a solemn obligation; fulfilled the law of humanity, gratitude and filial duty; and acted faith in the covenant and promise of God given to his forefathers. He is never so much an Egyptian, as to forget he is an Israelite; but, engaged in the duties of a son of Israel, he remembers he was a naturalized Egyptian. Having deposited the sacred pledge in the cave of the field of Machpelah, he and his brethren and all his retinue return into the land of Egypt.

Terror ever haunts the guilty conscience; and men, whether they be good or bad, are apt to judge of others by themselves. The brothers of Joseph considered the life of their father as the only bulwark betwixt them and their brother's anger. Knowing themselves to be criminal, they conclude he must be resentful; knowing he had the power, they suppose he must needs have the inclination to punish them. O how guilt degrades, debases the spirit of a man! In bad minds how quick the transition from extreme to extreme! How nearly allied to each other, vices seemingly remote, contradictory and opposite! These reflections are all strikingly exemplified and illustrated

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in the conduct of Jacob's sons. We see malice and cruelty passing into suspicion and timidity; insolence but a single step removed from fawning, flattery and submission; and bold defiance of Heaven changing in a moment into superstitious horror. They had before done obeisance to Joseph, not knowing who he was, and so fulfilled the dreams of his early youth, which had given them such mortal offence. With a meanness equal to their former haughtiness, they now voluntarily prostrate themselves in his presence, and humbly deprecate that wrath which they had so unjustly provoked. What a pitiable, what a contemptible figure a man makes, overtaken and reproved by his own wickedness!

A little mind would have enjoyed this triumph of acknowledged superiority, if it did not resort to retaliation. But a great soul like Joseph's gives only into emotions worthy of itself. Seeing his father's children thus humbled before him, he dissolves into tears. Had he been ever so much inclined to vengeance, adjured by the awful names of his father and his God, his heart must have relented, and anger must have turned to pity. But in truth, he had never harboured one thought of revenge, and the offenders possessed an infinitely better security in the generosity and compassion of their brother, than in the protection of their father's feeble arm, parental authority, or frail life. Being at no variance with them, entertaining no grudge, mark what pains he takes to reconcile them to themselves; "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."*

Such is the exalted triumph of true goodness. Not satisfied with merely bestowing forgiveness, it strives to close the wounds which guilt has made: it aims

* Gen. l. 20, 21.

aims not only at bettering the external condition of the penitent, but also at meliorating his inward frame; it not only proclaims peace to the offender, but likewise generously studies the means of restoring him to peace with his own conscience. This is the glorious triumph of God himself, who overcomes evil with good, turns enmity into love, and obliterates the foul traces of undutifulness and ingratitude, by painting over them the fairer, softer features of filial tenderness and dutiful submission. And in no one respect can human nature so nearly resemble the divine, as in pardoning transgression, in shewing mercy, in bestowing on the guilty outward and inward peace, and burying and effacing painful and mortifying recollections in total and everlasting oblivion. Thus Joseph comforted his brethren, and spake kindly unto them. This spirit, a greater than Joseph, by precept, by example, and by the model which he prescribed for our devotions, has recommended and enforced; and thus, by habitually drinking into it, "men shall at length become perfect, as their Father in heaven is perfect."

At the death of his father, Joseph was fifty-six years old. The history of the remainder, containing a period of fifty-four years more, shrinks into a few short sentences. But they exhibit a beautiful and instructive picture of a generous spirit, of great and growing domestic happiness, of a capacious prophetic soul, and of a faithful, obedient and believing heart. He had the satisfaction of living to see his posterity of the fourth generation, by Ephraim his younger son, and of the third, by Manasseh his first-born. He had the felicity of beholding Israel greatly increased, and the promise of God hastening to its accomplishment; resigned to die in Egypt, but looking and longing for a sepulchre in Canaan. Jacob's, a life of almost uninterrupted misery, is lengthened out to the hundred and forty-seventh year; Joseph's, with the exception of a very few years, a scene of splendour,

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useſulneſs and proſperity, is cut ſhort at a hundred and ten. But the difference dwindles into mere nothing before Him, with whom "a thouſand years are as one day, and one day as a thouſand years." Grief has its cure, uſefulneſs its period, glory its decay, and pride its deſtroyer in the grave. As his dying father held him engaged by a ſolemn oath not to bury him but in Canaan, ſo Joſeph binds his poſterity by a ſimilar obligation to carry his remains, when opportunity offered, to the ſacred ſpot where the ſleeping duſt of Abraham, Iſaac and Jacob repoſed. Whatever had been his power or poſſeſſions in Egypt, this is all he bequeaths to his children: his laſt, dying will, diſpoſes of nothing but his bones. But it is not merely the natural deſire of the man, to reſt in death with his fathers; it is the zeal, piety and wiſdom of the believer, leaving to his family a ſolemn pledge of his dying confidence in the truth and faithfulneſs of God. Accordingly, the dead body of Joſeph becomes no inconſiderable object in the hiſtory of Iſrael, from this time forward, to their final eſtabliſhment in Canaan. With much pomp it was now embalmed; with much care it was preſerved in their deepeſt diſtreſſes and affliction; in all their wanderings it accompanied them, and never, till they reſted in the peaceable poſſeſſion of the land of promiſe, did it reſt in the peaceful tomb.

But had the credit of Joſeph declined before his death? Had Pharaoh died, and Egypt forgotten to be grateful, that no royal mandate is iſſued for a ſplendid public interment; that an affectionate nation accompanies not, with tears, the ſon, as they did the father, to his long home? Miſerable would Joſeph have been, had not his happineſs reſted on a ſurer foundation than the ſmile of kings, or the applauſe of a multitude. Who ſhall be vain of any thing, when ſuch a man as Joſeph muſt be content to obtain that by entreaty and permiſſion, which once he could have enjoined by authority. His pious attention to the dead

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is now requited by the pious attention of the living. And thus of all the debts contracted by us, none is so certain of being repaid, as the last solemn offices of humanity. Here, we only give and receive a little short credit; and the day of our burial hastens on, with rapid wings, to bring the account to a balance.

Thus lived, and thus died, Joseph the son of Jacob. A man, whom all nations, and every description of mankind, have united to praise and admire. Whose character and fortunes the pen of inspiration has vouchsafed to delineate with singular accuracy, and with uncommon strength of colouring. Who in every stage of life, in youth, in manhood, and even to old age, interests, instructs and delights every reader of taste, virtue and sensibility. Who, in adversity preserved inflexible constancy; and, in elevation next to royalty, adorned his high station by unaffected simplicity, incorruptible integrity, native, unassuming dignity, fervent piety, invariable moderation, and uniform modesty and humility. Who, as a son, a brother, a servant, a father, a master, a ruler, is equally amiable and praise-worthy. Who, to the sagacity of the statesman added the penetration of the prophet, the firmness of the believer, and the purity of the saint. Who, by the blessing of Providence, was saved through dangers the most threatening, to pity, to forgive, and to preserve those who meant to have destroyed him; and who, in a word, was miraculously raised up of God from an obscure station, to be an instrument of much temporal good to nations; to mature and execute the plans of eternal Wisdom, and to typify to a dark age, Him who is fairer than the children of men, and through whom all the blessings of nature, of providence and of redemption are communicated to mankind. We cannot therefore, as christians, conclude his history better, than by considering it somewhat more particularly, as a typical representation of the person, the character, the offices, and the work of the Messiah.

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We know the generation of Joseph the son of Rachel, and the well-beloved of Jacob—but "who shall declare the generation" of the well-beloved Son of God, "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?" Early, unambiguous prognostics foretold the future greatness of Joseph. Thus the tongues of a thousand prophets; signs in heaven and signs in earth; the disposition of angels singly, and of a multitude of the heavenly host together, before and at his birth, conduct the babe of Bethlehem from the manger to the throne. Some allegorists, who inquire rather curiously than wisely, have carried the analogy so far as to represent Joseph's coat of many colours, the distinguishing badge of his father's partial affection, as typical of the body prepared for Christ, "curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth." When imagination, unrestrained by reason, and unconducted by scripture, is set to work, any thing may be made to resemble any thing. But if the interests of true piety be promoted, we must give, as we need and expect, much allowance; and so long as a metaphor presumes not to pass for a text or an argument, let metaphorical language be examined with candour, and the bold flights of an honest heart be treated with tenderness and respect. While we thus plead indulgence for others, we are perhaps making an apology that is necessary to ourselves; and far, very far from this place be the vanity of thinking that "surely we are the people, and that wisdom shall die with us."

We remarked of Joseph, that in making his observations upon, and in giving the report of his brother's conduct, a mixture of self-sufficiency, malevolence and presumption might possibly insinuate itself; but in the censure and reproof administered by the Brother and Friend of mankind, we always discover unmixed benevolence and gentleness; severity against the offence without acrimony towards the offender; slowness to condemn, readiness to forgive; a disposition to palliate and excuse the worst of crimes, instead of

of eagerneſs and zeal to detect, magnify and expoſe the leaſt. Jacob's affectionate embaſſy to his ſons in the wilderneſs, by the mouth of his beloved Joſeph, in all its circumſtances, has already been noticed as exactly typical of the meſſage borne from the compaſſionate Father of men, to his wandering exiled children, by the Son of his love. Who can think of Joſeph following his brethren from place to place with thoughts of peace, and meeting in return with hatred and violence, without reflecting the next moment on the words of the evangeliſt, "he came to his own, and his own received him not." "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." "O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the prophets, and ſtoneſt them which are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not?"*

Joſeph was ſold at the ſuggeſtion of Judah to the Iſhmaelites for a few pieces of ſilver. The counterpart of this forces itſelf upon our imagination. "The Son of Man ſhall be betrayed into the hands of men;" "mine own familiar friend, in whom I truſted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel againſt me."† "Judas, betrayeſt thou the Son of man with a kiſs?" Joſeph faithful and juſt to Potiphar and to Pharaoh; Joſeph in the form of a ſervant, and the buſineſs and affairs of his maſter proſpering in his hand, lead us directly to him of whom it is ſpoken in prophetic viſion, "Behold, my ſervant ſhall deal prudently, he ſhall be exalted and extolled, and be very high."‡ Joſeph aſſaulted with temptation, reſiſting and overcoming, conducts us with our tempted Saviour to the top of the exceeding high mountain, to the pinnacle of the temple, and ſhews us all the fiery darts of the wicked one falling harmleſs on the ground, becauſe ſtriking on the ſhield of faith; and "the ſword of the Spirit, the

* Matt. xxiii. 37. † Pſal. xli. 9. ‡ Iſaiah lii. 13.

word of God," like lightning penetrating and piercing the armour of the adversary. Joseph unjustly accused, condemned and punished, without straining for an allusion, points to Jesus, "numbered with trangressors," charged with crimes which he never committed, and upon a trial, a mockery of all legal proceeding, condemned with the vilest of mankind to the death of a slave.

But we see Joseph even in prison and disgraced, preserving dignity, exercising usefulness, disclosing futurity to his fellow prisoners, restoring the one to the presence and favour of Pharaoh, leaving the other to perish under the weight of the royal displeasure. Thus we see Jesus, from the exalted infamy of the cross, dispensing more than life and death, opening and shutting the gates of heaven, assuming to himself the right of disposing of seats in the paradise of God; carrying the penitent with him to the presence of his Father and his God; leaving the impenitent to die in his sins. But there is here this remarkable difference, Joseph besought the chief butler to remember him, hoping to owe his enlargement to the powerful, compassionate and grateful intercession of that officer; but Jesus, as Lord of the worlds visible and invisible, as the sovereign disposer of all things, by his own power exalts his fellow sufferer from the cross to a throne above the skies. Behold Joseph translated from the dungeon to the palace, from the condition of a prisoner and a slave, to that of a mighty prince; and in that, behold Jesus emerging from the tomb, ascending above all height, exalted to the sovereign administration of all things in heaven and in earth. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"* "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."† Joseph revealed to Pharaoh and to all Egypt what

* Luke xxiv. 26. † Heb. ii. 10.

what was the will of Heaven concerning them for many years to come: thus Jesus revealed to a guilty, perishing world the will of God for their salvation, and made timely provision, not for the transient and ineffectual support of a few fleeting years, but for the eternal entertainment and felicity of men, who were devoted to death, and threatened with everlasting misery. Joseph employed the pressure of famine to enslave Egypt, and to subject a whole people to the will of the sovereign: but Jesus, armed with all power for our destruction, employed it only for our deliverance; and instead of sinking and degrading the subjects of his government, such is his love, he raises them all to the dignities, privileges and possessions of the sons of God. He is the true prophet, "the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world," "in whom the Spirit of God is; none so discreet and wise as he," Zaphnathpaaneah, the true revealer of secrets, who "is worthy to take the sealed book," which contains the secrets of the eternal mind, and to open its seven seals. The clemency of Joseph to his unkind, unnatural brothers, is a lively and affecting representation of the patience, gentleness and mercy of Christ to his brethren after the flesh, in the first instance, and to guilty ungrateful men in general. "Father forgive them," said he, as he was expiring on the cross, "they know not what they do." And not many days after that with wicked hands men had crucified and slain him, many thousands of these very men were made to taste of his grace, were admitted into his family, and exalted to a place with him on his throne. But we must not pursue the similitude through every particular; it would protract our discourse to an immoderate length. Finally then, Joseph piously referred every thing that befel him to the provident, wise and gracious destination of the Almighty: and what saith Jesus? "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." "My meat is to do the will

of him that sent me, and to finish his work." "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

And thus have we finished the history of the patriarch Joseph: the various stages of whose life may be thus calculated. He was born in Haran, in the year of the world two thousand two hundred and fifty-nine, where he lived till six years old. He was then removed with the rest of his father's family into Canaan, where he lived eleven years; at which period he was by his brethren sold to the Ishmaelites, and carried into Egypt, where he served Potiphar ten years, and remained in prison three: so that he was thirty, when he first stood before Pharaoh, and was raised immediately to the dignity of viceroy. Supposing the seven plenteous years to commence immediately, he was thirty-seven when they ended: and the second year of famine being ended, he being then thirty-nine, Jacob and his family descended into Egypt; and the aged patriarch lived there cherished by his son seventeen years, which brings himself forward to his fifty-sixth year. After his father's death he lived fifty-four years more, in all one hundred and ten. So that Joseph lived in Egypt full ninety-three years: a slave and a prisoner thirteen: a prince and ruler eighty: under several successive monarchs; being justly esteemed a necessary minister of state in all reigns. He died before the birth of Moses sixty-four years, and before the departing of the children of Israel out of Egypt one hundred and forty-four. And with the account of his death and embalming, ends the book of Genesis, containing the most ancient, authentic, interesting and instructive history extant; during the space of two thousand three hundred and sixty-nine years: from the deluge seven hundred and thirteen; and before Christ one thousand six hundred and thirty-five.

These things seem as a tale that is told. But time is hurrying on a period and an establishment of things, under

under which Adam and his youngeſt ſon ſhall be contemporaries; in which intervening ages ſhall be ſwallowed up and loſt; and that only remain, which time and death and the grave cannot affect, when the cave of Machpelah ſhall ſurrender up its precious depoſit; when Abraham, Iſaac, Jacob, Joſeph, Moſes and all the faithful ſhall live again and reign forever and ever. "Bleſſed are they who ſhall eat bread in the kingdom of God." "Bleſſed are they who ſhall come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeruſalem, and to an innumerable company of angels: to the general aſſembly and church of the firſt born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, and to Jeſus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of ſprinkling, that ſpeaketh better things than that of Abel."*

* Heb. xii. 22—24.

History of Moſes.

LECTURE XVIII.

EXODUS xi. 1—10.

And there went a man of the houſe of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a ſon; and when ſhe ſaw him that he was a goodly child, ſhe hid him three months. And when ſhe could no longer hide him, ſhe took for him an ark of bulruſhes, and daubed it with ſlime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and ſhe laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his ſiſter ſtood afar off to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to waſh herſelf at the river, and her maidens walked along by the river's ſide: and when ſhe ſaw the ark among the flags, ſhe ſent her maid to fetch it. And when ſhe had opened it, ſhe ſaw the child: and behold, the babe wept. And ſhe had compaſſion on him, and ſaid, This is one of the Hebrew's children. Then ſaid his ſiſter to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go, and call to thee a nurſe of the Hebrew women, that ſhe may nurſe the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter ſaid unto her, Go. And the maid went, and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter ſaid unto her, Take this child away, and nurſe it for me, and I will give thee thy wages: and the woman took the child, and nurſed it. And the child grew, and ſhe brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her ſon: and ſhe called his name Moſes; and ſhe ſaid, Becauſe I drew him out of the water.

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IF the ingenious fictions of ancient bards afford an innocent and rational amusement, and be therefore held in high estimation; what superior obligation is the world under, to that divine Spirit who has vouchsafed to draw into light the most remote antiquity, to preserve from oblivion the venerable men who first cultivated and peopled the earth; and, in the language, not of fiction, but of truth, has delineated the ways of Providence, and unfolded the deep and intricate recesses of the human heart? Were it not for the sacred pages of divine revelation we should have been entirely ignorant of what happened in the world for at least one half of its duration. But borne on the wings of inspiration, we fly back to the very birth of nature, we behold the first dawning of light scattering the gloom, and converse with the first man whom God created upon the earth. And how much more pleasant, as well as profitable, is it, to expatiate in the field of real history, than to wander and lose ourselves in the idle regions of romance! If we owe much to the illustrious poet of Greece, for his amusing pictures of early life and manners, how deeply are we indebted to the more illustrious Jewish historian and poet, who has furnished us with so much juster and more exalted ideas of Deity, more faithful and instructive pictures of human life; and who has so successfully interwoven the history of redemption with that of mankind.

The sacred book which has afforded us during the year past, so much pleasing instruction, is altogether extraordinary in its kind, whether we consider the beauty of the composition, the importance of the information which it contains, the internal marks of authenticity which it bears, or the noble purposes to which it has been, and may be made subservient. Moses, its inspired author, who has with so much accuracy, elegance and force, described the characters and lives of the patriarchs from Adam to Joseph, is now entering on his own wonderful and interesting story.

story. The man who henceforth acts, is the same who writes: the events which he is about to record come, not from the information of others, but from his own immediate knowledge; and the simplicity and candour of his narration are sufficient vouchers of its truth and faithfulness.

Sixty-four years had now elapsed from the death of Joseph, and one hundred and thirty-four from the descent of Jacob into Egypt: and what surprising changes have taken place! A little band of seventy persons is multiplied into a great nation: the mild and gracious prince who took pleasure in cherishing and protecting the father and brethren of Joseph, is exchanged for a jealous and sanguinary tyrant, determined to depress and extirpate their descendants: the country which once gave them support and shelter, is now moistened with their tears, and with the blood of their infant offspring; and favoured guests, made to dwell in the best of the land, are turned into odious slaves condemned to the furnace. Such are the alterations which time is continually producing in human affairs, such the impotency of man to secure blessings to his posterity, such the misery of a people subjected to the will of a despotic sovereign.

In vain do men dream of national generosity and gratitude—they exist not: in vain do the claims of humanity and justice oppose themselves to the interest, the ambition or caprice of princes. Joseph had very unwisely contributed to the aggrandisement of the Egyptian monarchs, and his own family is the first to feel the rod of that power which he had helped to raise. Injustice in princes is always bad policy. A nation so certainly favoured of Heaven as Israel was, must have proved the strongest bulwark to Egypt, if treated as friends. Increased from seventy souls, to six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, it was dangerous to irritate them, and difficult if not impossible to subdue. Too proud to enter into treaty with them as allies, too timid to attempt their extirpation

tion by open force, and too ſuſpicious to confide in their gratitude and attachment, Pharaoh adopts the barbarous policy of undermining their ſtrength by exceſſive labour; of breaking their ſpirit by ſeverity, and of preventing their future increaſe, by putting to death their male children as ſoon as they were born. Such a ſtate of things was very unfavourable to marrying and giving in marriage. Nevertheleſs marriages were contracted, and children procreated; for it is abſurd as it is wicked, for any earthly power whatever to ſet itſelf to counteract the great plans of God and nature. God has ſaid "increaſe and multiply;" in vain has Pharaoh ſaid "abſtain." Amram of the family of Levi, accordingly, in theſe worſt of times, takes to wife Jochebed of the ſame tribe, indeed his own father's ſiſter, by whom he had three children; Aaron, probably born before the bloody edict for deſtroying the males was publiſhed; Miriam, whoſe ſex was a protection from the rigour of it, and Moſes, who came into the world while it was operating with all its horrid effects.

Joſephus in his Jewiſh antiquities relates, that about the time of the birth of Moſes, one of the Egyptian ſeers informed the king that a child was about to ariſe among the Iſraelites, who ſhould cruſh the power of Egypt, and exalt his own nation to great eminence and ſplendour, if he lived to the years of maturity: for, that he ſhould diſtinguiſh himſelf above all his contemporaries by his wiſdom and virtue, and acquire immortal glory by his exploits. He farther alleges, that the king, inſtigated by his own fears of ſuch an event, and by the cruel counſels of the ſeer, iſſued the bloody decree which muſt be an eternal blot upon his memory.

The diſtreſs of Jochebed upon finding herſelf pregnant, is to be conceived, not deſcribed. The anxiety and apprehenſion naturally incident to that delicate ſituation, muſt have been aggravated by terrors more dreadful than the pangs of child-birth, or even

even the loſs of life itſelf. As a wife and a mother in Iſrael, ſhe was looking and longing for the birth of another man child; but that ſweet expectation was as often checked and deſtroyed by the bitter reflection that ſhe was ſubject to the king of Egypt; that if ſhe bare a ſon it was for the ſword, or to glut ſome monſter of the river. The Jewiſh antiquarian informs us, that the anxiety of the parents was greatly alleviated by aſſurances given to the father in a viſion of the night, that the child with whom his wife was then pregnant ſhould be miraculouſly preſerved, and raiſed up by Providence to the glorious and important work of delivering the ſeed of Abraham from their preſent miſery. And indeed, this fact is countenanced and ſupported by the ſhort hints which ſcripture has given us of the ſubject. Among the other inſtances of victorious faith recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, that of the parents of Moſes is marked with honour and approbation by the apoſtle. "By faith Moſes, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, becauſe they ſaw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."* It is not unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, that their faith might have ſome particular promiſe or intimation from Heaven to reſt upon.

The time at length came that ſhe ſhould be delivered; and ſhe brought forth a ſon, according to the ſame hiſtorian, without the uſual pains and conſequent weakneſs of child-bearing; by which means no foreign aid being required, concealment was rendered more eaſy, and the exertions of the mother in behalf of her child, were ſcarcely, if at all, interrupted. "A goodly child" is the modeſt language which Moſes employs in deſcribing himſelf: "exceeding fair," or fair to God, that is, divinely fair, is the ſtronger expreſſion of St. Stephen, in his recapitulation of this period of the Jewiſh hiſtory. From which, without the fond encomiums of profane authors, we may

* Heb. xi. 23.

may conclude, that Providence had diſtinguiſhed this illuſtrious perſon from his birth, by uncommon ſtrength, ſize and beauty. Every child is lovely in the partial eye of maternal affection: what then muſt Moſes, the wonder of the world, have been to his enraptured parents! But the dearer the comfort, the greater the care, and that care increaſing every hour. Not only the child, and ſuch a child, was continually in jeopardy, but certain and cruel death was hanging every inſtant, by a ſingle hair, over the heads of all who were concerned in the concealment; nay, the ſalvation of a great nation was at ſtake; nay, the promiſe and covenant of God was in queſtion.

In the conduct of theſe good Iſraelites, the parents of Moſes, we have a moſt inſtructive example reſpecting many important particulars of our duty. They teach us, that no circumſtances of inconveniency, difficulty or danger, ſhould deter us from following the *honeſt* impulſes of our nature, or from complying with the manifeſt dictates of religion; and, at the ſame time, reprove that would-be-wiſe generation of men among us, who, from I know not what reaſons of prudence, or others which they dare not avow, defraud their country, the world, and the church of God, of their due and commanded increaſe. Their faith in God, employing in its ſervice ſecrecy, vigilance and circumſpection, admoniſhes us ever to connect the diligent uſe of all lawful and appointed means, with truſt in and dependence upon Heaven, as we wiſh to arrive ſafely and certainly at the end propoſed. In them, as in a glaſs, we ſee confidence without preſumption, diligence, zeal and attention free from incredulity; we ſee Providence firmly, undauntedly reſorted to, with the conſciouſneſs of having done their utmoſt to help themſelves. Without this truſt and this conſciouſneſs, yielding their joint ſupport, what muſt the wretched mother have been, compelled at length, by dire neceſſity, to expoſe the ſon of her womb on the face of the Nile, in a baſket of ruſhes?

I love

I love to see a perseverance of exertion that leaves nothing undone which is possible to be done; and a faith that holds out as long as hope exists. Why not cast the whole burden on Providence? Is not he who preserved the child floating in an ark of bulrushes, able to save him naked in the stream, or even in the jaws of the hungry crocodile? If an ark must be prepared, is it also necessary to employ all this curious attention in daubing it with slime and with pitch, to prevent the admission of the water? What, leave nothing to him who has marked the infant for his own, and solemnly charged himself with his safety? Yes; after we have done our all, much, every thing depends on the goodness of Heaven. But the careful mother did well when she pitched every seam and chink of the frail vehicle as attentively as if its precious deposit had been to owe its preservation solely to that care and diligence. "Cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you."* Mark it well, it is our *care*, not our work, which we are encouraged to cast upon that God who careth for us, and who hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Mark yet again the diligent use of means, and the interpositions of Providence; how they tally with, unite, strengthen and support each other. The anxious mother does not yet think she has done enough. Miriam her daughter must go, and, at a distance, watch the event. And here ends the province of human sagacity, foresight and industry; and here begins the interposition of providential care. The mother has done her part. "The rushes, the slime, and the pitch," were her prudent and necessary preparation. And the great God has at the same time been preparing his materials, and arranging his instruments: the heart of a king's daughter, the power of Egypt, the flux of the current; the concurrence of circumstances too fine for the human eye to discern, too complex for

* 1 Pet. v. 7.

for human underſtanding to unravel, and too mighty for created power to control.

We pointed to the interpoſition of Heaven; but, we beſeech you to obſerve, it interpoſed not by working a miracle, but by the ſeaſonable, ſimple and natural diſpoſition of ſecond cauſes, operating to one and the ſame end, without any deſign, conſciouſneſs or concert of their own. And, be it ever remembered, that the wiſe, gracious, almighty Ruler of the world, pleaſes not himſelf, nor amuſes his creatures, by a profuſe, oſtentatious exhibition of wonders, but by an intelligent and dexterous management of ordinary things. He carries on his righteous government not according to new and ſurpriſing laws, but by the ſurpriſing, unaccountable, unexpected methods in which he executes the laws which he has eſtabliſhed from the beginning.

Let us dwell a little on the minuter circumſtances of the caſe before us: as they ſerve to illuſtrate a ſubject of all others the moſt comfortable and tranquilizing to a race of beings, beyond meaſure wretched and pitiable, if there be not a God who rules in wiſdom and in loving kindneſs all the affairs of men. We are firſt led to the humble cottage of Amram, and mingle in the tender ſolicitudes of an obſcure family, in one of the moſt common ſituations of human life. From thence, we ſtep immediately to the palace, to attend the humours, caprices and pleaſures of a princeſs. Jochebed, the wife of Amram, and Termuthis, the daughter of Pharaoh! What can they have in common with one another, excepting thoſe particulars in which all mankind reſemble all mankind: And yet Providence brings them together, gives them a mutual concern, a mutual charge, a mutual intereſt. By how many accidents might this moſt fortunate coincidence have been prevented? A day, an hour earlier or later, in the active care of the one, and the contingent amuſement of the other, and the parties concerned had never met. The ſlighteſt alteration

alteration in the ſetting-in of the wind or the tide; the particular temperature of the fleeting air, or the more variable temperature of a female mind, apt to be corrupted by unbounded gratification and indulgence, unaccuſtomed to contradiction, governed by whim, following no guide but inclination, and occupied only with the object of the moment: the operation of all, or any one of theſe, might have defeated the deſign. But theſe and a thouſand ſuch like contingencies unſtable as water, and changeable as the wind, ſubdued by the hand of Omnipotence, acquire the ſolidity of the rock, and the ſtedfaſtneſs of the poles of heaven. The mother could not part with her child a moment ſooner, durſt not retain him a moment longer. The princeſs could betake herſelf to no other amuſement or employment, could pitch upon no other hour of the day, could reſort to no other part of the river, could divert her attention to no other object; the tide could not run, nor the wind blow in any other direction, nor with greater or leſs rapidity. Moſes was not ſafer when king in Jeſhurun, encompaſſed with the thouſands of Iſrael, was not ſafer in the mount with God, is not ſafer within the adamantine walls of the new Jeruſalem, than Moſes in the flags, Moſes at the mercy of the waves, of the monſters of the Nile, and of men more mercileſs than wild beaſts. What power threatened the life of Moſes? The king of Egypt. What power preſerved it? The king of Egypt's daughter. What were the ſteps which led to his elevation? Thoſe which foreboded his deſtruction. What circumſtances forwarded the accompliſhment of the oracle? Thoſe which attempt to defeat it. Could all this have been the work of man? No; it muſt have proceeded from "the Lord of Hoſts, who is wonderful in counſel and excellent in working." "Who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can ſtay his hand, or ſay unto him, what doeſt thou?"*

The

* Dan. iv. 35.

The usual train of common events led Pharaoh's daughter to the river side; the ark in which little Moses was laid happened to catch her eye; curiosity prompted her to examine its contents, and pity at the sight touched her heart. If there be an object in nature more interesting and affecting than another, it was that which now presented itself to this great lady's eye. A beautiful infant, of three months old, deserted by its own parents, exposed to ten thousand dangers, and expressing by the tender testimony of tears, its sense of that misery of which it had not yet acquired the consciousness. "Behold the babe wept." Pity is a native plant in a noble heart. The story told itself. The situation in which the child was found explained the cruel occasion. The sacrament he carried engraven on his flesh, declared to whom he belonged. Compassion was fortunately connected with power, and Providence wisely balanced one thing with another, the jealousy and severity of the father, with the tenderness and generosity of the daughter.

Josephus, with whom Moses is justly a favourite object, has recorded many little particulars relating to this part of his history. And, among others, that when the child was applied to the breasts of several successive Egyptian nurses, he turned from them with signs of much disgust and aversion, and that this encouraged his sister Miriam, who was anxiously attending the event, and observed the eager concern of the princess about her little foundling, to propose calling a nurse of her own nation, and thereby artfully introduced the mother herself to the tender office of suckling her own child. Whatever be in this, one useful lesson is taught us, on better authority than that of Josephus, namely, that perseverence in difficult and painful duty is the shortest and safest road to the attainment of our just and reasonable desires. What a blessed change! The mother of Moses is permitted to do that for princely hire, and under royal protection, which she would have purchased with her life the privilege

ilege of doing for nothing, could ſhe but have done it with ſafety to her child. Moſes find ſhelter in the houſe of Pharaoh, from the wrath of the king, and he who was deſtined to be the plague of Egypt, and the deliverer of Iſrael, is trained to power, wiſdom and conſequence, by the Egyptian Magi, and the favour of her who was next the throne.

But, the Providence which ſaved him amidſt ſo many perils, is pleaſed to record and to perpetuate the memory of his deliverance in his name. It was cuſtomary to name the child on the day of circumciſion, the eighth from its birth. Perhaps the anxiety and diſtreſs of their ſituation might have broken in upon ſome of the ceremonies practiſed upon that occaſion: or, if a name had been given him by his parents, he has not thought proper to hand it down to poſterity. It being his own deſign and the will of God, that he ſhould be known to all generations by the appellation which Pharaoh's daughter gave to the babe whom ſhe ſaved from periſhing; *Moſes*, "drawn out," "becauſe," ſaid ſhe, "I drew him out of the water."

The Jewiſh writers take delight—and who can blame them? in expatiating on the extraordinary accompliſhments, external and mental, natural and acquired, of their great law-giver. They aſcribe to him the moſt perfect ſymmetry of features, uncommon height of ſtature, a noble commanding demeanour, the moſt engaging ſweetneſs of diſpoſition, the moſt winning addreſs and eloquence, the moſt undaunted courage, the moſt profound erudition. Indeed the ſingular beauty of his perſon is hinted in no obſcure terms in many places of ſcripture, and the additional luſtre which it afterwards acquired by intercourſe with Heaven, luſtre which remained unimpaired to the lateſt old age, convey to us a very high idea of his external appearance. But he ſtands in no need of the pen of a Philo or a Joſephus to make his panegyric. His own actions and writings are his nobleſt monument; and will live to inſtruct, delight and bleſs mankind,

kind, as long as good sense and good taste, virtue, patriotism and religion exist, and are held in estimation in the world.

The parallel between the Jewish and the Christian legislators is so striking, and supported by so many scripture authorities, that he who runs may read it. Previous to the birth of Moses, the Israelitish state was reduced to the lowest ebb of distress and despondency; the birth of Christ found a lost world sunk into the most deplorable corruption, guilt and misery. Of the appearance of Moses there was a general expectation over all the land of Egypt. Christ, "the desire of all nations," was earnestly looked for by "all who waited for the consolation of Israel," who searched the scriptures, and observed the appearances of the times; and by infallible signs was his approach announced to mankind. The deliverer of the seed of Jacob was no foreign potentate, with a strong hand and stretched-out arm, but a child of their own nation. And who is the Saviour of perishing sinners? "Verily he took not on him the nature of angels: but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."* "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."† The extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Moses were ascertained to the world, and transmitted to posterity, by means of an edict of the king of Egypt. The birth of Christ, in like manner, as to time, place and situation, was marked out for the knowledge of mankind by a decree of Cæsar, the emperor of Rome. Both the one and the other, but for the special interposition of Heaven, had fallen victims to

* Heb. ii. 16, 17. † Heb. ii. 14.

the jealousy and apprehensions of two bloody and ambitious princes. Moses escaped the hands of Pharaoh by falling into those of his daughter. Christ avoided the cruelty of Herod by retiring for a while into Egypt. All history agrees in representing Moses as a person of extraordinary grace, wisdom and comeliness; and of whom is the prophet speaking, when he says, "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever."* Moses was brought up in all the learning of the Egyptians. Christ was anointed with the Spirit without measure. Moses stands distinguished by a name which commemorates a temporal deliverance. Christ by two names, descriptive of his high and important office, "Jesus," the Saviour, and of the manner in which he was set apart to it, "Christ," the anointed of God. Moses began not to exist till the day that his mother Jochebed bare him in Egypt, but Christ says of himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." Moses from the beginning was faithful as a servant to Him who appointed him; but "Christ as a son over his own house: for in all things he must have the pre-eminence." Now to God in Christ be ascribed, by all nations, and generations of men upon earth, and by every angel in heaven, kingdom, power and glory forever. Amen.

* Psal. xlv. 2.

END OF VOLUME II.